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ABSTRACT

A study explored factors contributing to the high attrition rate of Latino students in Hillsborough County (Florida) schools. Focus groups and interviews were conducted with 54 teachers; 52 high-achieving, 39 at-risk, and 6 dropout Latino middle and high school students; and 14 parents. Findings indicate that factors important to academic success of Latino students were student motivation, student involvement in activities, and supportive parents and teachers. Factors contributing to Latino student dropout included student motivation and peer associations, lack of parental support, language and cultural barriers, school system issues and policies, and poor teacher-student relationships. Participants felt that the most likely social impacts resulting from Latino students dropping out would be their future lack of employment and life opportunities and increased involvement in illegal activities. Resources available to meet the needs of Latino students included Latino clubs, academic remediation, Latino or bilingual staff supports, programs for migrant students, job training programs, and occupational counseling. Programs for the larger student body focusing on promoting academic, vocational, or personal success were also identified. Recommendations included increasing support from parents, Latino/bilingual staff, and mentors; improving communication between schools, students, and parents; promoting appreciation for Latino culture; and improving access to available services and supports. Ten appendices present participant demographics, school district withdrawal codes, reasons for placement into alternative education, focus group and interview guides, and the screening survey. (TD)

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THE LATINO COALITION

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THEY ARE OUR KIDS: FINDINGS FROM THE LATINO DROPOUT STUDY

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THEY ARE OUR KIDS:
FINDINGS FROM THE LATINO DROPOUT STUDY

The Latino Dropout Analysis was conducted by
The Latino Coalition and
The Department of Child and Family Studies
Louis de la Parte Florida Mental Health Institute
With funding and support from the Children's Board of Hillsborough County

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CONTRIBUTING STAFF

The following individuals from the Louis de la Parte Florida Mental Health Institute contributed to various parts of the study:

Teresa Nesman, M.A.: Coordinated all phases of research in collaboration with the Latino Coalition's Student Dropout Committee.

Janice Worthington, M.S.: Completed the qualitative data analysis, wrote the section summarizing the findings from focus groups and interviews, and compiled all sections of the report.

Reginald Lee, M.A.: Carried out the database analysis and wrote the section summarizing findings from the school system database.

Maridelys Detrés, B.A.: Contributed to development of focus group protocol, translated consent forms and letters into Spanish, contacted schools and scheduled focus groups, screened participants, co-facilitated focus groups, summarized findings and assisted in interpreting findings.

Nichole Spalding-Watson, B.A.: Contributed to development of focus group protocol, developed the screening instrument and translated it into Spanish, contacted schools and scheduled focus groups, screened participants, co-facilitated focus groups, summarized findings and assisted in interpreting findings.

Amina Porter, M.S.: Assisted in the collection and summarization of grants and resources for Latino students dropout prevention.

Mario Hernandez, Ph.D., Division Director of TREaD: provided advice, support and supplemental fundings.

Ruby Joseph, M.A., TREaD Research Faculty: provided advice and training for focus group recruitment, protocol development, implementation and analysis.

Angela Gomez, M.A.: Completed the Action Plan based on the data gathered by the Children's Board of Hillsborough County and the findings from this study.

Kristen M. Snyder, Ph.D., Policy and Services Research Data Center in the Department of Mental Health Law & Policy, Co-Director and Assistant Professor: provided advice and support for the database analysis.

The members of the Latino Coalition who contributed to this study were:

Joe Brennan, D.S.W.: was a member of the Latino Coalition subcommittee guiding this study and assisted in focus group facilitation.

Miguel Fuentes: assisted in focus group facilitation.

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Rosa Ramírez, L.C.S.W.: was a member of the Latino Coalition subcommittee guiding this study and assisted in focus group facilitation.

DESCRIPTION OF THE LATINO COALITION

Mission Statement

The Latino Coalition's mission is to improve the quality of life of the Latino community by working together through community empowerment, advocacy an/or access to community resources. The Latino Coalition is a group of individuals from the community and service providers with a common interest in ensuring the Latino community's access to resources in Hillsborough County. The group was formed in 1997 for the purpose of encouraging coordination and increased collaboration among agencies and individuals that serve the Latino community. Representatives from the following agencies participate in the Coalition: Catholic Charities, the Children's Board of Hillsborough County, Hillsborough County School District, Louis de la Parte Florida Mental Health Institute, Redlands Christian Migrant Association (RCMA), Hispanic Services Council (HSC), Hillsborough County Hispanic Liaison office, Alpha House, March of Dimes, Northside Mental Health Center, and other individual partners.

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

CONTRIBUTING STAFF ii

DESCRIPTION OF THE LATINO COALITION iv

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS v

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY 1
- Introduction 1
- Emerging Themes 2
- Contributors to Latino Student Success 2
- Contributors to Latino Student Dropout 3
- Anticipated Societal Implications 4
- Available Resources 4
- Resources Needed 5
- Results of Database Analysis 5
- Need for Further Study 6
- Action Plan 6

I. INTRODUCTION 7
- Purpose of the Study 7
- Background 7
- Goals and Objectives 9

II. METHODOLOGY 11
- Rationale for the Use of Qualitative Methods 11
- Participant Subgroups 12
- Recruitment 13
- Protocol Development 14
- Facilitation of Groups 15
- Data Analysis 15
- Interpretation of the Summary Presentation 17
- Study Limitations 18
- Database Analysis Procedures 19
- Exemplary Programs and Resources Review 19
- Action Plan Procedure 19

III. FOCUS GROUP AND INTERVIEW FINDINGS 21
- Contributors to Latino Student Success 21
- Additional Issues Not Shared by All Groups 24
- Possible Contributors to Latino Student Dropout 28
- Additional Issues 40
- Potential Societal Implications of Latino Student Dropout 41

Existing Educational Programs and Resources Addressing the Needs of At-Risk Latino Students 44
Specific Social Service Needs of Latino Students Not Currently Being Met.. 49

IV. DATABASE ANALYSIS FINDING 63
Social and Demographic Factors 64
School Factors 66
Latino Staff and Student Distribution 70
Discussion **72**

V. CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS 73
Enhance Communication and Support for Students, School Personnel and Parents 73
Increase Participation in and Availability of Activities 74
Promote Appreciation for Latino Culture 75
Collaborate to Enhance Community Supports and Adapt School Policies to Community Strengths and Needs 76

VI. ACTION PLAN 77
Findings from the Discussion Groups 77
Designing the Plan 78

ENDNOTES 85

REFERENCES 86

APPENDICES 87

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

INTRODUCTION

This study was conducted by the Latino Coalition of Hillsborough County, Florida in partnership with the University of South Florida's Louis de la Parte Florida Mental Health Institute (FMHI). The study design utilizes both qualitative and quantitative methodologies to analyze Latino[1] student characteristics and summarize participant perspectives. This report focuses on the findings from the qualitative portion of the study, derived from a combination of both focus groups and in-depth interviews, while also presenting Latino student demographics and school characteristics using data from the Testing and Evaluation Department of the Hillsborough County School District (HCSD). Finally, group discussions with parents, community leaders, and school administrators and teachers helped validate the importance of the factors identified as having the most impact in Latino student success and the influence they can exert over these factors.

Focus groups and semi-structured in-person and telephone interviews were conducted with at-risk, high achieving and dropout Latino students, as well as teachers, principals, school system personnel, and community representatives. The study was exploratory in nature and designed to gain an understanding from the perspectives of these participants as to the factors that may be contributing to the high attrition rate of Latino students in Hillsborough County schools. It was expected that this exploration would provide some insight into the elements that contribute to student success and aid in the further identification of strategies to reverse the trend toward dropping out, while encouraging academic achievement. More specifically, it was the hope of the Latino Coalition that this study would provide helpful information to guide recommendations concerning coordination and collaboration among agencies and individuals serving the Latino community.

This study does not offer confirmatory findings concerning the factors that correlate most highly with Latino student dropout and success. Rather, it focuses on participants' perspectives of what may contribute to student attrition and academic success, thereby giving voice to several key stakeholders on the issue. In sharing their perspectives, participants may or may not have accurately identified the issues that a statistical analysis would find as most predictive of student outcomes.

Emerging themes were summarized across participant types (i.e., students, teachers, administrators, and community representatives) and illustrated with examples and quotes. Where a theme is unique to a particular subgroup (i.e., high achieving students), this differentiation is noted. Although included in the development of the major themes across participant type, no differentiation in perspectives could be made for community representatives and dropout students, as the number of participants in these subgroups was extremely small.

Emerging Themes

The emerging themes from the study constitute the type of information that might be obtained from a brainstorming activity, where participants are asked by those interested in gaining some insight into Latino student dropout to lend their perspective for the purpose of increasing their understanding of the relevant issues. Participants in such an activity might be asked to identify some of the things that they believe are contributing to Latino student dropout, as well as those that promote student success. They might also be asked to list all the current resources they are aware of and to indicate where they believe the resources should be expanded or newly developed to most effectively address this issue.

Although participants did not contribute to the study as a collective in such a brainstorming activity, the questions used to guide the focus group discussions and individual interviews were open-ended and designed to promote discussion and increase understanding. Rather than attempt to brainstorm these issues in a large forum, the study methodology called for the segmentation of groups by shared characteristics (i.e., students, teachers, parents) and individual interviews with additional stakeholders. The use of a focus group methodology in qualitative data collection allows for each group of participants to maintain their own distinctive identity (Morgan, David L. 1998), while contributing to the overall knowledge of the issue across participant types. Unlike a collective brainstorming session, the use of focus groups and individual interviews provided an opportunity for participants to speak freely in a comfortable setting of their peers and allowed for complete anonymity.

Guided by the questioning routes employed during both the focus groups and interviews, participants provided valuable insight and perspective as to the factors that may be contributing to the academic success or failure of Latino students, while speculating as to the societal implications of Latino students dropping out. Participants also identified a wide variety of resources currently available to Latino students and the overall student body through the schools and community agencies. In addition, based on their knowledge of available programs, they identified areas of unmet need.

Participants consistently perceived the responsibility for Latino student success and dropping out to be shared by the student as an individual, their parents, and the schools. Although much less of a focus, the community was also perceived as playing a role in student outcomes. This overarching theme reveals that participants recognize that student success or failure cannot be attributed to one or even two factors, rather that it is a complex issue. It also emphasizes the importance of using a comprehensive approach in dealing with the problem of Latino student attrition and provides insight into the potential inroads for creating a meaningful collaboration among the agencies and individuals serving the Latino community. The findings offer important insight for the community's consideration when identifying a strategic approach for the allocation of current and future resources to promote Latino student success.

Contributors to Latino Student Success

Participants consistently identified the following three factors as being important to the academic success of Latino students. The factors are presented in no particular order.

Possible Contributors to Academic Success
• Student personal motivation to succeed • Student involvement in activities • Supportive parents and teachers

- Participants perceive student success as being achieved and sustained primarily through the combined efforts of the individual student, their parents, teachers, and other supports. Successful Latino students were consistently characterized by participants as having a sense of personal motivation to succeed, the ability to avoid negative peer groups, and a level of involvement in extracurricular and other activities.

- Participants also believed that successful students were most likely to be receiving supportive attention from both parents and teachers. Supportive parents were characterized as valuing education and teaching their children those values at home, by emphasizing the importance of homework and having regular contact with the school and individual teachers. Supportive teachers were described as encouraging students, taking the time to explain concepts, keeping things in simple terms, and providing individual attention after class.

Contributors to Latino Student Dropout

Participants consistently identified the following five factors as potentially contributing to Latino student dropout. The factors are presented in no particular order.

Possible Contributors to Latino Student Dropout
• Student motivation and peer associations • Lack of parental support • Language and cultural barriers • School system issues and policies • Poor student/teacher relationships

- Participants perceived several factors as contributing to Latino student dropout, with no one factor receiving clear emphasis over another. Rather, participants attributed a student's decision to drop out to a wide variety and possibly a combination of factors that may be unique to each student. As with success, students, parents, teachers, and the schools were all believed to have the potential to contribute to student dropout. Participants most consistently identified the following factors as influencing student dropout: poor student/teacher relationships, a lack of support and even pressures from parents and peers, language and cultural barriers between the students and their peers as well as school personnel, school system issues and policies, and a student's personal motivation and choice of peer associations.

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- Poor student/teacher relationships and a lack of parental support were believed to cause students to feel unsupported and ultimately discouraged, thereby diminishing their commitment to school. Language and cultural barriers were reported to exist between students and their peer group, students and school personnel, and between parents and the schools. Limited language abilities were also frequently identified as a barrier to academic success. An individual student's lack of motivation and the cultural and economic pressures that students face from peer groups and family was also perceived to influence dropping out.

- School policies reportedly pose additional barriers to student success. Participants believed that those who fall behind in their credits due to absences or tardies and have limited options for making up their credits become frustrated, ultimately giving up on school. In addition, the interpretation and application of school absence policies and what were considered to be unrealistic academic benchmarks were also perceived barrier to student success.

Anticipated Societal Implications

Participants consistently identified the following two factors as being the most likely implications for society from Latino students dropping out. The factors are presented in no particular order.

Societal Implications for Latino Student Dropout
• Lack of employment and life opportunities • Involvement in illegal activities

- Two key societal implications for Latino students dropping out emerged from the research. Participants expected dropping out to lead to a lack of employment and other life opportunities. Dropping out was also expected to lead to increased involvement in illegal activities.

- Participants recognized that by dropping out, a student's opportunities for employment that offers a living wage and the potential for growth was extremely limited. They also believed that the best chance for students to obtain a good education was to remain in school and graduate, rather than dropping out and attempting to continue their education through other means. Students that dropout were expected to become frustrated with the employment opportunities available to them, causing some to turn to the use or sale of drugs, theft, and/or other forms of illegal activity.

Available Resources

- A wide variety of both activity-oriented resources and programs and academic supports were mentioned as being available to Latino students. Although this study did not focus on documenting exemplary programs currently in place to address the Latino student

attrition rate, participants' ability to identify such a large number of programs and services revealed that significant efforts are already underway by the schools and community agencies to address the Latino student attrition rate.

- According to participants, students have access to several resources designed specifically to meet the needs of Latino students, including Latino clubs, academic remediation, and Latino and/or bilingual staff supports. Many schools offered or connected students with programs specifically designed to encourage the success of migrant students. Other programs were designed to promote the vocational success of Latino students through job training, and occupational counseling. In addition to those resources offered specifically to Latino students, participants mentioned a wider array of programs available to the larger student body, all focused on promoting academic, vocational, and/or personal success.

Resources Needed

Among the wide variety of resources participants identified as needing to be offered or expanded, participants focused on the following three issues, which are presented in no particular order.

Primary Needs Expressed by Participants
• Increased support (parents, Latino/bilingual staff, mentors)
• Improved communication between schools, students, and parents
• Improved access to available services and supports

- In identifying the unmet needs of Latino students, participants emphasized the importance of parental involvement and the presence of other adult supports, including teachers, specifically those who are Latino or bilingual. Given that these supports were critical, efforts to facilitate parent involvement and the need for additional Latino or bilingual staff, mentors, and role models was identified.

- Participants indicated a need for improved communication between the schools and Latino families. Specifically, that both parents and children needed to be better informed concerning available resources, while parents needed to have more regular contact with teachers and other school personnel. Both students and parents were described as needing better access to available programs and services in terms of scheduling and transportation.

Results of Database Analysis

- A profile of Latino student risk factors was developed using the social, demographic and school factors of Latino youth who drop out of school or are at risk of dropping out of school, from a database maintained by the Testing and Evaluation Department of the Hillsborough County School District (HCSD). Findings revealed that Latino students

eligible to receive free meals at school were also more likely to drop out. In addition, students classified as monolingual or predominantly Spanish speaking were more likely to drop out than biiingual students.

- School risk factors for dropping out were identified as including a lack of regular school attendance, tardiness, low achievement, retention in grade, and discipline problems, especially at the middle school level. Involvement in LEP classes was not associated with being at-risk of dropping out. Among Latino students in Exceptional Education and Alternative Education placement, those who were classified as SED and EH, or placed in disciplinary, juvenile justice, or substance abuse programs, were at higher risk of dropping out.

- School factors suggested the need for greater focus on maintaining the enrollment of middle school students where there is a high ratio of Latino students to Latino administrators and teachers. There was a trend toward high ratios in lower income schools and lower ratios in higher income schools, indicating the importance that community-wide efforts be made to recruit teachers and/or at a minimum identify those in the Latino community who can assist in this ongoing effort.

Need for Further Study

Further study is required, including correlational and comparative analyses across subgroups of Latino students to confirm the factors that most highly correlate with the risk of dropping out. In addition, studies focusing on the career tracks of both dropouts and graduates would add valuable information about the needs and strengths of these students. Such a study may be most easily conducted through the combined efforts of community agencies and businesses that employ or serve this population and the reinstatement of program previously in place through the school district, which provided resources for following dropouts.

Although not the focus of this study, it was clear from the many resources participants identified as being available to Latino students, that efforts are already underway by the schools and community agencies to reduce the rate of attrition. Further study is needed to identify those programs and approaches that are most effective in reversing this trend and promoting school success for Latino students in particular.

Action Plan

The post-study group discussions held with parents, community leaders, school administrators and teachers provided a high degree of congruency with the findings from this study. An action plan was developed to:

- Enhance communication and support for students, school personnel, and parents;
- Increase participation in and availability of activities;
- Promote appreciation for Latino culture; and
- Collaborate to enhance community supports and adapt school policies to community strengths and needs.

I. INTRODUCTION

PURPOSE OF THE STUDY

This study was conducted by the Latino Coalition of Hillsborough County, Florida in partnership with the University of South Florida's Louis de la Parte Florida Mental Health Institute (FMHI). The study design utilizes both qualitative and quantitative methodologies to analyze Latino[2] student characteristics and summarize participant perspectives. This report focuses on the findings from the qualitative portion of the study, derived from a combination of both focus groups and in-depth interviews, while also presenting Latino student demographics and school characteristics using data from the Testing and Evaluation Department of the Hillsborough County School District (HCSD).

The study was funded by a grant awarded to the Latino Coalition by the Children's Board of Hillsborough County. In-kind services were provided by Latino Coalition members, who recruited and moderated focus groups; by Kristen Snyder, Ph.D. of the Division of Mental Health Law and Policy at FMHI, who coordinated the quantitative data analysis; and by the Hillsborough County School District, which provided assistance in the recruitment of students for the study and in arranging facilities for data collection.

The interest for this study arose out of the Latino Coalition's desire to ensure the Latino community's access to community resources, including education. It was coupled with the knowledge that the rate at which Latino students are dropping out of school in Hillsborough County is higher than it is among any other population. For these reasons, the Coalition desired to gain a greater understanding from a variety of key stakeholders of the issues that could help to explain this trend and support the efforts of those serving the Latino community to reverse it.

This study does not offer confirmatory findings concerning the factors that correlate most highly with Latino student dropout and success. Rather, it focuses on participants' perspectives of what may contribute to student attrition and academic success, thereby giving voice to several key stakeholders on the issue. In sharing their perspectives, participants may or may not have accurately identified the issues that a statistical analysis would find as most predictive of student outcomes. Instead, the value of the information is that it yields insight into the experience and knowledge of several key stakeholders on this issue. In the absence of such a study, these stakeholders may not otherwise be heard.

BACKGROUND

The magnitude of the issue of Latino student dropout is supported in recent studies documenting the growth rate of the Latino population in Florida and Hillsborough County specifically.

- Some predict that between 1995 to 2005, Florida will experience a forty percent (40%) increase in the population of Latino children (Children's Board of Hillsborough County 1993).

- In Hillsborough County alone, the total population of Latinos at the latest census count was thirteen percent (13%), with those between the ages of zero to 17 (27%) and 25 to 44 (31%) representing the largest portion of the population

Evidence indicates that this growing population poses new and continuing challenges for service providers and policy-makers, as many struggle with poverty.

- More than one-half (54%) of Latinos are represented in the bottom twenty percent (20%) of the highest earning households in the county, while only fifteen percent (15%) are in the top twenty-percent (20%) of these households (Children's Board of Hillsborough 1993).

- Recent Hillsborough County School system data indicated that more than one-fourth (27%) of students classified as "Hispanic" were eligible for free lunches, while one-fourth (25%) received Title I services, and twenty-one percent (21%) were eligible for reduced lunches. (Florida Department of Education 1998).

Latino Student Attrition

In the 1997-98 school year, those students classified as Hispanic made up eighteen percent (18%) of the total school membership (Florida Department of Education 1998). The numbers of Latino graduates were representative, with sixteen percent (16%) of the students graduating with a diploma and eighteen percent (18%) of graduating with a certificate. However, those who were truant, placed in alternative schools, or dropped out tended to be over-representative of the population. Beyond the growth rate of the Latino population in Hillsborough County, the following data reveal the importance of mobilizing family, school, and community resources to address Latino student attrition rates.

- While suspensions of Latino students in high school (19%) and junior high school (18%) during 1997-98 were representative of the total population of Latinos in Hillsborough, Latinos were over-represented in alternative placements for grades 7, 8 and 9 (19-23%) (Florida Department of Education 1998).

- Latinos comprised more than one-fourth (28%) of those reported as truant for the 1997-98 school year in Hillsborough County and twenty percent(20%) of the dropouts. (Florida Department of Education 1998).

- Latino students were dropping out of school most frequently in the 8th grade (25%), followed by the 9th and 10th grades (21% each).

- Of the students in dropout prevention programs, nineteen percent (19%) were Latino. Latinos also made up one-fourth (25%) of the total non-promotions (retentions) in Hillsborough County schools. Non-promotions represented eleven percent (11%) of the Latino school population. In comparison, white non-Latino students comprised 41% of the non-promotions, representing only six percent (6%) of that population.

Factors Affecting Latino Student Success

There are multiple social and economic factors that have been identified by researchers as affecting Latino student success. These factors include family structure and attitudes, immigration status (legal, illegal, refugee), child's age upon entry, the living conditions of the child prior to entering the U.S., type of community in which the child currently lives, origin of birth (U.S. or foreign), country of origin, skin color, available support systems inside and outside the U.S., and mobility patterns (Board of Children and Families 1995). Other categories that may affect school success include psychological factors, such as ability, self-confidence, aspirations, sociability; and personal factors, such as early marriage and pregnancy, criminal activity, or drinking (Rumberger 1983).

Although many factors such as those named above have been associated with dropping out, it is important to consider that individual reasons for dropping out can vary greatly among Latino students and there may be combinations of factors that cannot be easily linked to the final decision to leave school. This study does not attempt to statistically correlate any of these factors with dropping out or academic success. Rather, it attempts to further explore the issue by documenting participants' perceptions of factors that may be contributing to success or failure.

Goals and Objectives

The stated objectives of the study involved exploring with participants the possible factors contributing to Latino student dropout, as well as those factors that may promote academic success and thereby distinguish those who dropout from those who stay in school. It was hoped that this exploration would yield information that would be helpful in guiding recommendations concerning coordination and collaboration among agencies and individuals serving the Latino community. More specifically, it was designed to obtain candid and in-depth information to:

(1) Identify possible factors or causes contributing to the Latino dropout rate;

(2) Identify possible characteristics which are unique to specific Latino populations of students that may affect academic success;

(3) Identify potential social and/or societal implications of dropping out;

(4) Identify existing educational programs/resources (formal and informal) that may address the specific needs of at-risk Latino students;

(5) Identify specific social service needs of Latino students; and

(6) Provide evidence to support the development or expansion of community-based programs designed to address the needs of Latino students who have dropped out and those at risk of dropping out.

The findings of the study are being used to develop recommendations to expand upon the current efforts being made to reduce Latino dropout. These recommendations will focus on a culturally sensitive approach to dropout prevention strategies, through the integration of Latino parent and student input into program design and the identification of systemic/structural issues that need to be addressed. Recommendations are also aimed at supporting the development of partnerships between the school district, service providers, and community-based organizations to meet the needs of specific Latino populations.

II. METHODOLOGY

RATIONALE FOR THE USE OF QUALITATIVE METHODS

Based on an interest in hearing from a variety of key stakeholders on the issue of Latino dropout and a further interest in learning about the topic from different subgroups of students, focus groups were chosen as the primary data collection methodology for the study. Researchers (Hughes & DuMont, 1993) point out that when research is carried out with diverse populations, there is a need to provide insight into the range that exists in social and psychological processes both within groups and between groups. To this end, they suggest that such information may be obtained more accurately through qualitative methods such as focus groups, which merge "good science" with respect for "a group's spirit" (Hughes & DuMont 1993:776). Focus groups are also valuable in ensuring that the topic of interested is researched from the participants' perspective and not just through a set of disciplinary filters and blinders (Morgan, D.L. 1988). For this study, focus groups also offered a practical option for collecting data from a large number of stakeholders in a timely manner, at a relatively low cost.

Researchers confirm that the validity obtained through focus group research is due to its emphasis on participant's perspectives. Focus groups provide the opportunity to pursue specific topics and observe both shared knowledge and behaviors among the group, as well as differences in experiences (Hughes & DuMont 1993:776). Although this method does not support hypothesis testing, its strength is that it facilitates the exploration of a range of issues and perspectives, and can lead to new ways of framing and interpreting data, thus broadening the understanding of a particular phenomenon (Hughes & DuMont 1993:776).

Research on focus group methodology suggests that it is good practice to "concentrate on those population segments that are going to provide the most meaningful information" on a topic (Axelrod, 1975b: 10, in Morgan D. L. 1988). In selecting the population to be studied, it was important to focus on hearing from those who may have the least involvement in direct implementation of interventions for Latino dropout, while having important first-hand knowledge of the causes and potential solutions for the trend. As there are numerous stakeholders to the topic of Latino dropout, it was important to create "a reasonable amount of homogeneity" (Morgan, D.L. 1988: 46) within groups in terms of background and role-based perspectives to foster discussion. This approach of categorizing participants by type also helps to eliminate the potential for conflict that can be created by mixing participants across different levels of hierarchy or status (Morgan, D.L. 1993). To that end, focus group participants were categorized as parents, teachers, and students.

Participant groups and subgroups were selected based on their ability and interest in speaking about the topic and their willingness to discuss the topic in a group setting. Homogeneous subgroups were also identified among student participants to facilitate discussion among like individuals. These involved categorizing students as high achievers, at-risk of dropping out, and those who had already dropped out. Several focus groups were conducted with each stakeholding group to minimize the effect of individual group dynamics and to cross-validate emerging themes. In addition, these subgroups represented several different catchment areas in

the Hillsborough County School District. This broad geographical coverage required more groups to ensure that content specific to certain areas was not overlooked.

Although extensive efforts were made to include Latino dropouts in the study, sample bias occurred in that their participation was minimal. In addition, fewer parents participated than expected and data collection with community representatives and school district representatives was limited to a small number of individual interviews. As a result, the major themes of the study were derived primarily from the focus group data, with the recognition that due to sample bias the findings do not necessarily represent the full spectrum of experiences and opinions of dropouts. However, the ability to triangulate the data from homogeneous subgroups and in-depth interviews with additional stakeholders served to strengthen the study findings.

More than simply documenting perspective, the research hoped to provide enough data for limited content analysis based on a relatively unstructured group process, where the topics were chosen and worded for the purpose of promoting discussion. Through the reliance on a very limited number of open-ended questions, it was hoped that the discussion would be guided only insofar as the issues of interest, thereby allowing the identification of factors that contribute to Latino dropout or promote success to emerge in the absence of researcher-imposed agendas.

Focus groups in this study served a dual purpose, 1) to answer questions within the specific parameters of this specific research, and 2) to assist in the exploration of issues for further study. The study sought to learn something new through direct contact with participants and give voice to those that might not otherwise be heard. Experts in the use of focus group as a social science methodology support this particular application of focus groups, indicating that while they are useful for investigating what participants think, they are particularly helpful in gaining an understanding of the reasoning behind the perspective (Morgan, D.L. 1988).

In order to focus on participants' perspectives, topic guides were open-ended and moderator involvement in the groups was relatively low. As a result, findings are more likely to reflect what the participants, not the moderator, determined to be interesting or important. One potential advantage of this application of focus group methodology is that several different individuals moderated the groups, thereby minimizing the degree to which the perspectives or agendas of an individual moderator could impact the data. The disadvantage is that despite receiving the same expert training, the likelihood of differences in approach, comfort level, and style of each moderator are greater than if a single moderator conducted all groups.

Participant Subgroups

A total of twenty-three focus groups with 165 participants were conducted between March and May of 1999, by Latino Coalition members and researchers at the Louis de la Parte Florida Mental Health Institute. Each focus group lasted approximately an hour and a half and all were tape recorded with the consent of participants. Focus group participants included low and high achieving Latino students currently enrolled at three middle schools and four high schools in Hillsborough county, along with former students who had dropped out of school, parents of students, and teachers at each of the schools. Table 1 details the total number of participants in the focus groups by type and overall.

Table 1: Number of Focus Groups and Participants by Type		
Participant Type	# of Focus Groups	# of Participants
Total Students	15	97
High Achievers	7	52
At-Risk	6	39
Dropout	2	6
Total Teachers	7	54
Total Parents	2	14
Total	24	165

Among the three subgroups of students, seven groups were conducted with high achievers and six with at-risk students, while only two groups were conducted with students who had dropped out of school. Seven groups were also conducted with teachers, while two were conducted with parents. Across groups, teachers (n = 54) and high achievers (n = 52) participated with the greatest frequency, followed by at-risk students (n = 39), parents (n = 14), and dropouts (n = 6).

In addition to the 24 focus groups, 16 individual telephone or face-to-face interviews were conducted with middle and high school principals, as well as teachers and coordinators of specific school-based educational programs, and several community representatives. Community representatives included those representing local churches, community colleges, business, and others involved in assisting students in their occupational pursuits. In order to protect the confidentiality of study participants, the names of the specific schools or other organizations represented will not be used.

RECRUITMENT

For the purposes of this study, participants were recruited from schools representing a high concentration of Latino students and both rural and urban areas in the Hillsborough County School District. The Latino Coalition, researchers, and school district staff collaborated in the selection of participating schools. All of the schools selected for the study participated. In addition, participation was strictly voluntary and designed to engage individuals who were familiar with the school experiences of Latino students.

Individual students were recruited with the assistance of the schools. Recruiters described the target population of students (i.e., high achiever or at-risk) to a designated contact person in each school. The contact person then created a list and set appointments for students to be individually screened and scheduled for either the at-risk or high achieving focus group.

Schools also assisted in recruiting teachers for the study. Initially, principals were approached and asked to identify teachers knowledgeable about the Latino student population, who would be willing to participate actively in the group discussion. In some cases, the principal provided the names of potential participants, while in others they referred the recruiter to another individual in school who could assist with recruitment. These teachers were then invited

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to participate by the contact person in the schools or by one of the researchers. Those who participated in the focus groups were there by invitation only.

Students who had dropped out of school were recruited using a variety of methods, including circulating fliers, visiting GED classes at adult and evening schools, sending letters to individuals enrolled in night school, and visiting two English as Second Language (ESOL) classes for migrant adults. In addition, Latino Coalition members who have direct contact with Latino families assisted in identifying potential participants.

Ultimately, recruiters found dropout students very difficult to recruit. Many students refused to participate and others simply failed to attend the focus groups. As a result, only six dropouts actually participated in this study. However, combined with the data collected from those students categorized as low achievers, the study provides insight into the differences and similarities between the high achievers and those at risk of school failure/dropout.

During the process of screening students to determine their eligibility and willingness to participate in the focus groups, students were asked if their parents might also be interested in participating. Students who believed their parents would be interested provided their home phone numbers. Parents were then recruited through personal phone calls to their homes. While the required number of parents were recruited in three of the targeted geographic areas (two rural and one urban), parents only attended two of the scheduled groups. The research team struggled to identify a recruiter to assist in contacting families in the urban areas and many of those who had agreed to participate failed to show up for the group.

The research team was most successful recruiting parents in the two rural areas. Both of the groups representing these areas were held at a religiously-affiliated location (i.e., a church and a migrant mission). In both instances, recruiters for these groups had close affiliations with migrant families and were known and trusted in the community.

Participating principals and assistant principals represented the same pool of schools (i.e., four middle and four high schools) as the students and teachers. All but two of the principals who were asked agreed to participate in an interview for the study.

Members of the Latino Coalition initially recommended members of the community to participate in individual interviews. Further recruitment followed a snowball method, whereby those individuals were called and asked to participate or recommend someone to participate. In addition, community agencies having direct contact with Latino business and professional people in the community were contacted and asked to recommend individuals to participate in the study. Once a list had been developed, the research team contacted those who were most able to speak to the issues in the study and willing to give their time to be interviewed. Interviews were conducted by members of the Latino Coalition and the research team lead, with each interview lasting approximately one hour.

Protocol Development

The focus group topic guide was drafted by researchers Nichole Spalding-Watson, Maridelys Detrés and Teresa Nesman, at the Louis de la Parte Florida Mental Health Institute (FMHI) in collaboration with the Latino Coalition. It was developed based on the experience and expertise of service providers who are members of the Latino Coalition and in conjunction

with a review of the literature conducted by FMHI research staff. The final version of the guide was revised by FMHI research staff in consultation with focus group expert, Ruby Joseph, M.P.A., from the Department of Child and Family Studies at FMHI.

The guide used in key stakeholder interviews was an adaptation of the guide used in the focus groups, both of which addressed the same issues. The interview guide for school principals was developed by the research team and was primarily derived from the focus group topic guide, with modifications based on preliminary findings from the focus groups. Please refer to Appendix I for a copy of these guides.

All student focus group participants voluntarily completed a brief screening survey prior to the focus group. The survey was made available in both Spanish and English and was drafted by researchers at FMHI and revised with input from Latino Coalition members. Ultimately, only the parent focus groups were conducted in Spanish. Students were given the option of Spanish or English and preferred to participate in English. Please refer to Appendix J for a copy of the screening survey.

Facilitation of Groups

The Latino Coalition identified bilingual professionals with group process experience to act as focus group moderators. Once identified, these individuals attended moderator training sessions conducted by Ruby Joseph, M.P.A. of FMHI's Department of Child and Family Studies and Division of Training Research Evaluation and Demonstration (TREaD), in February of 1999.

Each focus group was conducted by a two-person team, including a moderator and co-moderator. Both individuals had received focus group training and were either a Latino Coalition member or an FMHI research team member. Moderators and co-moderators for parent and student focus groups were bilingual, allowing the groups to be conducted in either language or a combination of the two languages, according to the preference of the group. All participants signed an informed consent form, which was also written in both Spanish and English, prior to their participation in the focus groups. All groups were tape-recorded and notes were taken to summarize major topics of discussion.

Facilities for the study were provided by participating schools, religious institutions, and recreational facilities, and secured by the FMHI research team, with assistance from Latino Coalition members.

Data Analysis

Data analysis was based primarily on what is typically referred to as qualitative or ethnographic summary, with a heavy reliance on direct quotation of group discussions rather than the numerical descriptions of the data that are possible with full content analysis. Given the limited time and budget for this study, actual coding and tallying of responses to provide numerical representation of content was not possible. Rather, themes were generated through qualitative summary across subgroups of participants, with specific differences or emphasis noted by subgroup where appropriate.

Based on the reliance on clear divisions between population subgroups (i.e., at-risk and high achieving students, teachers, and parents), analyses required that the subgroups be considered to some extent as separate focus group studies. This was important to ensure that perspectives that may be highly relevant for one subgroup are not overlooked in the summarizing the key issues emerging from the focus groups as a whole. It also allowed analyses to present a discussion that combined the themes emerging across subgroups, as well as some comparison between subgroups.

The topic guide served as the "practical structure for organizing the topic-by-topic analysis of the discussions." (Morgan, D.L. 1988: 66). During the focus group, the guide organizes each group's discussion around the same set of topics and in the same order. It is therefore an effective tool for organizing and comparing findings across groups during the process of analysis.

Researchers identify the group as the "fundamental unit of analysis" (Morgan, D.L. 1988: 64), thereby supporting an approach to analysis that begins in a group-by-group progression. Initially, co-moderators extracted the information gathered from each group from their notes and tape recordings. They then clustered each groups' responses according to the areas of interest identified in the topic guide and provided supporting quotations. Their data was then presented to the FMHI research coordinator, along with the screening surveys. De-briefings were held between the research coordinator and FMHI research team members, for the purpose of comparing data across groups and discussing overall impressions.

The initial team analyses were provided to an experienced qualitative data analyst, who clustered responses by like sub-categories of respondents and then by topic area across groups. This allowed for the emergence of broad analytic categories representing like themes, as well as revealing those unique to a particular subgroup. Additional de-briefings were then held between the analyst and research coordinator as well as other FMHI research team members for the purpose of discussing and clarifying emerging themes.

Simply stated, responses were clustered by topic across subgroups in an effort to determine the presence or absence of certain themes and the level of agreement or disagreement on those themes across subgroups. For example, not all issues raised by students were also raised by parents and teachers and not all subgroups emphasized the same issues within a given topic. Analytic clustering of like themes allowed the analyst to identify all categories of response separately group-by-group without predicting which would emerge as being most consistent within and across subgroups.

In person and telephone interviews with other stakeholders of Latino dropout offered an opportunity for cross-validation of focus group data, as well as additional perspective on the issues. These interviews represented an opportunity to include the perspectives of stakeholders who may be less comfortable freely expressing their ideas in a group of their peers. Although focus group and interview data were analyzed separately, a similar process of clustering responses by topic and subgroups was utilized and later triangulated and combined with the findings from the focus groups and the screening surveys. A comprehensive overview of emerging themes is presented in the Summary of Findings and Conclusions section of this report.

The Summary of Findings presents a standard technique of combining topic driven paragraphs with quotations, with the paragraphs setting the stage for participants' specific

comments and likewise being supported by those comments. Themes emerging across subgroups on a given topic are represented as major findings, with any clear differences by subgroup duly noted. In addition, themes unique to particular subgroups were reported, as they represent the depth of the data.

It is also important in qualitative analysis to provide evidence that some topics are rarely mentioned. Without identifying even the most remote categories, there is a potential to lose important distinctions. For the purposes of this study, the summary identifies issues that are mentioned with much less frequency and consensus as "Additional Issues." Due to limitations in time and the scope of this study, no strict counts of responses were made for the purposes of content analysis.

Topics were analyzed independently of one another in the Summary of Findings. This means that no effort was made in the body of the report to create a running commentary on previous perspectives to explain the statements. For example, when students identify their poor relationships with teachers as having the potential to influence dropping out, the corresponding mention of the importance of supportive teachers under the topic of student success reflects without summary, individual differences among teachers and their rapport with students and the dual role they play in student success and failure.

Emerging themes and quotations were not identified by the individual schools participants represent. Not only was it important to maintain the confidentiality of those interviewed by not identifying the school of reference, it was beyond the methodology of focus group analyses to identify individual participants' comments by their schools of origin. Students participated as a group, with multiple schools being represented in each group. As a result, it was not possible to identify comments on the tape recording as belonging to a specific individual.

Interpretation of the Summary Presentation

Emerging themes from this study constitute the type of information that might be obtained from a brainstorming activity, where participants are asked by those interested in gaining some insight into Latino student dropout to lend their perspective for the purpose of increasing their understanding of the relevant issues. Participants in such an activity might be asked to identify some of the things that they believe are contributing to Latino student dropout, as well as those that promote student success. They might also be asked to list all of the current resources they are aware of and to indicate where they believe the resources should be expanded or newly developed to most effectively address this issue.

Although participants did not contribute to the study as a collective in such a brainstorming activity, the questions used to guide the focus group discussions and individual interviews were open-ended and designed to promote discussion and increase understanding. Rather than attempt to brainstorm these issues in a large forum, the study methodology called for the segmentation of groups by shared characteristics (i.e., students, teachers, parents) and individual interviews with additional stakeholders.

Experts in focus group methodology and analysis agree that the use of a focus group methodology in qualitative data collection allows for each group of participants to maintain their own distinctive identity (Morgan, David L. 1988), while contributing to the overall knowledge of the issue across participant types. Unlike a collective brainstorming session, the use of focus

groups and individual interviews provided an opportunity for participants to speak freely in a comfortable setting of their peers and allowed for relative anonymity.

In general, the findings of this study should be considered as an exploration to begin to help community agencies and individual leaders in partnership with the schools and others interested in the welfare of the Latino community to have further insight into the barriers to student success and the components of academic achievement.

There was no intention on the part of the research team to convince the reader of the truth or falsity of any one factor identified, but rather to provide some insight for those working to reverse the trend of Latino dropout. In addition, this study was not intended to be an evaluation of programs and interventions currently in-place for Latino students. These questions were not posed of participants, and therefore no data was available.

Study Limitations

Although every effort was made to hold the groups in a site that was both accessible to participants and met the facility needs of the researchers, ultimately, many groups were conducted in the schools, which met the practical needs of the study, while not being particularly "neutral," given the focus of the study. As a result, more of the major themes concerned the efforts of the schools and school staff, with little mention of the role of the community in student success and failure.

Since the presentation of the data is based on participant perception, many if not all current initiatives aimed at promoting Latino student success may not have been captured. It was beyond the scope of this study for researchers to confirm the accuracy of participants' perceptions and knowledge, rather it was important to document their level of understanding, rather than document current programs with accuracy, prove or disprove their perspectives, or extrapolate from their statements to infer other meanings.

It was also beyond the scope of this research for the analyst to review documentation mentioned in the focus groups, such as benchmarks or school policies to confirm or refute the accuracy of participants' perspectives. Rather, it was a powerful element of the analysis and the findings that the researcher did not have familiarity with these documents and therefore could make no judgment on these perspectives. The analyst was an independent analyst with no vested interest in the outcome of the research. Meaning, she had no knowledge of the accuracy or inaccuracy of participants' perspectives, rather perceived the responses as reflecting participants' base of knowledge, understanding, and experience with the subject matter.

This research was not intended to make a clear differentiation between Latino students and students of other ethnicities and backgrounds. Participants were not asked if the issues they raised for Latino students were the same or different from other populations. In addition, it was beyond the scope of this study to conduct statistical comparative analyses for the purpose of differentiating students by ethnicity.

Finally, this study does not offer confirmatory findings concerning the factors that correlate most highly with Latino student dropout and success. Rather, it focuses on participants' perspectives of what may contribute to student attrition and academic success, thereby giving voice to several key stakeholders on the issue. In sharing their perspectives,

participants may or may not have accurately identified the issues that a statistical analysis would find as most predictive of student outcomes.

Database Analysis Procedures

Data were analyzed from the database maintained by the Hillsborough County School District (HSCD) Office of Testing and Evaluation, for the purpose of describing the characteristics of Latino youth who withdrew or dropped out of school, those who remained enrolled, and those who graduated between 1997 and 1999. This analysis was based on data pertaining to all students identified as "Hispanic" who were enrolled in middle school or high school during the 1997-1998 and 1998-1999 academic years. Variables used in this study were specifically taken from the HCSD Student Record Database and included demographic information, enrollment records, discipline history, academic history, attendance records, special program placement history, and alternative education placement information (see Appendix B for the file names, contents and number of records). Each file contained a personal identifier that enabled files to be linked to form several databases for analytic purposes. The sample included approximately 19,350 Latino students in grades six through twelve, representing 151 different schools or educational settings.

The database analysis required the development of a data set connecting information from different files and containing records of various types. This necessitated developing algorithms to summarize records for individuals and to connect demographic information for each individual. Students were grouped according to their enrollment status using school district withdrawal codes to determine their status at a particular time (see Appendix B for the actual codes and labels). Students without a withdrawal code were assumed to be enrollees for the purposes of this study.

Exemplary Programs and Resources Review

A literature review was conducted to analyze components of exemplary programs serving Latino students around the U.S. The review was conducted by Teresa Nesman, M.A. and was presented with a summary and recommendations to the Latino Coalition's Student Dropout Analysis Committee. In addition, a search was conducted to identify grant funding sources, Latino student scholarship and project funding sources, and Latino student and family program contacts and addresses. This search for resources was conducted by Teresa Nesman, M.A. and Amina Porter, B.S. of the Louis de la Parte Florida Mental Health Institute.

Action Plan Procedure

In order to develop an action plan driven by the multiple players involved in the education of Latino students in Hillsborough County, five discussion groups were held. A representative from the Children's Board of Hillsborough County facilitated the groups. These groups were comprised of parents (two groups), school administrators and teachers (two groups), and

community leaders (one group). The groups with parents and school administrators and teachers were held in the same cluster areas used for this study. The group with community leaders was held at the Hispanic Services Council.

Table 2: Number of Discussion Group Participants by Type		
Participant Type	# of Groups	# of Participants
Parents	2	25
Administrators and Teachers	2	35
Community Leaders	1	10
Total	**5**	**70**

The format used for the discussion groups consisted of presenting to the participants the four major contributors to Latino students' success based on the analysis of this study. Participants were asked to provide their opinions about these contributors and to identify other factors that may have an impact on the success of Latino students. Once participants listed all contributors then they were asked to rank them in order of importance and also according to their ability to influence them.

The responses from all the groups' participants were statistically analyzed to determine what contributors were identified as having the most impact in Latino student success and how much influence the different players feel they can exert over these factors. The findings from the discussion groups were compared with the findings from this study to determine their congruency and to develop the action plan.

This study represents a summary of the findings from a small sample of students, parents, community stakeholders, and school personnel from Hillsborough County. As with all qualitative research, the findings are not intended to provide conclusive data, but rather explore the depth of experience of those affected by Latino student dropout. Qualitative methodologies provide a unique opportunity to obtain information from minority parents and students and lend a voice to those that may otherwise not be heard. These findings represent participants' perception of what the likely patterns are for individuals affected by dropping out of school and those who serve and educate them, while raising new questions that warrant further study.

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III. FOCUS GROUP AND INTERVIEW FINDINGS

The Summary of Findings represents a standard technique of combining topic driven paragraphs with quotations, with the paragraphs setting the stage for participants' specific comments and likewise being supported by those comments. Responses were clustered by topic across subgroups in an effort to determine the presence or absence of certain themes and the level of agreement or disagreement on those themes across subgroups.

Themes emerging across subgroups on a given topic are represented as major findings, with any clear differences by subgroup duly noted. In addition, themes unique to particular subgroups were reported, as they represent the depth of the data. The summary also identifies issues that were mentioned with less frequency and consensus as "Additional Issues." Due to limitations in time and the scope of this study, no strict counts of responses were made for the purposes of content analysis.

CONTRIBUTORS TO LATINO STUDENT SUCCESS

Participants consistently identified the following three factors as being important to the academic success of Latino students. These three factors emerge as the major themes in this topic area, and are presented in no particular order.

PERSONAL MOTIVATION TO SUCCEED

- Participants agreed on the importance of students having a personal sense of motivation to better themselves as a foundation for academic success. Those described as motivated were perceived as showing interest in school, paying attention in class and completing their work. For at-risk students, motivation constituted the achievement of personal goals, such as obtaining a good job or entering the military. High achievers described being motivated as wanting to "make their parents proud" or believing they have a responsibility to do well in school, based on what their parents have done for them. Some students also expressed a belief that they can achieve a better life with an education.

  "You have to focus what you are here for, to graduate. I don't want to disappoint my parents. I realize I have to go to school, college, help my family to better our situation." (High achiever)

  "If you don't go to school, you can't go to college and get a good job." (High achiever)

SUB-GROUP EMPHASES:

- For parents and students, motivation was tied to a desire to avoid poverty and the possibility of getting a better job through having an education.

  "I warn my kids that they should go to school, if they don't go, they'll have to work in the fields." (Parent)

  "I never thought about it [dropping out] because I see what my parents went through and the poverty we lived in coming to this country and I want to pay them back for what they did." (High achiever)

- High achievers believed that those students with a personal sense of responsibility, self-esteem, and pride in themselves and their Latino heritage, help them succeed academically. These students repeatedly expressed an interest in making others proud of them and being role models, specifically for younger siblings. They also have a deep sense of responsibility to their parents and families, and therefore make an effort to maintain a good reputation.

  "I like to do better because I can bring something home. I want everybody to feel proud of me." (High achiever)

- Teachers and principals described motivated students as being more likely to complete their work on time, study hard, pay attention, attend class, spend time with a positive peer group, be involved in activities both in and out of school, follow directions, and seek academic help.

  "These kids do their homework, they do everything...study for the tests, do extra credit even if they don't need it." (Teacher)

  "They're doing well, just like any other kid... it's hard to describe them because they're just doing well." (Principal)

SUPPORTIVE PARENTS

- Focus group participants perceived supportive parents to be an essential element in a student's academic success. Parental involvement, caring, and an emphasis on the importance of education and good grades were frequently identified as the foundation for academic success.

  "Never stop trying. My parents taught me that." (High achiever)

  "I am always in touch with the teachers...if I can't help my child in his homework [because I don't understand it], I call the teacher for help." (Parent)

"They're available by phone, they're up here for parent conference night, they come in to drop something off...they interact with you. They're on the phone, finding out if there's anything extra for those kids to come after school to do." (Principal)

SUB-GROUP EMPHASES:

- Supportive parents were described by students as providing help with homework, attending school conferences, communicating with teachers, and giving them advice. Even in homes where the parents are uneducated, their support of a student's decision to stay in school was described as a strength for that student. The emotional support provided by parents was as important, if not more important, than their assistance with school assignments.

  "I come to school because my Mom doesn't want me to be a drop out, like my brother." (At-risk)

  "My parents motivate me. They tell me to put my books first to become something for myself." (High achiever)

  "I thought about dropping out, but that would have killed my mom." (At-risk)

- High achievers specifically commented that parents who set rules for their children, explain the consequences for breaking rules, and foster positive family environments contribute to their success.

  "If I don't keep good grades, I get in trouble with my parents." (High achiever)

  "Our parents would not let us drop out. If we did that, they'd be up here with us the next day...they see the opportunity that I have and they didn't have." (High achiever)

  "I look up to my parents...I'm going the same route [college]." (High achiever)

- Teachers described supportive parents as maintaining regular contact with teachers and other school personnel. These parents were perceived as understanding the value of education and having high expectations for their students to achieve. Supportive parents were also perceived as being more likely to sacrifice for their children and infuse them with a sense of self-confidence and hope for what they can achieve with education. They were described as close knit and able to provide their children with much needed nurturing.

  "There is a positive correlation between high achieving students and parental involvement." (Teacher)

be central to student success, including active and regular communication with both students and teachers, volunteering at school, support for education instead of employment, and regular supervision.

"The best inheritance a parent can give a child is not money, but education." (Parent)

- Principals described supportive parents as speaking English in the home and "pushing" their children to pursue educational goals. Parent involvement was described as parents making themselves available by phone, attending school conferences, interacting with staff and periodically visiting the school. Parents or other relatives who act as role models were also considered to be important factors leading to success for students.

"I think for the most part you're talking about students whose parents not only speak English, but...are pushing them. I don't mean that in a derogatory sense, but I do mean that in the sense that they're pushing them toward a goal, whether that goal is to go on to a technical school, or go on to college, or go into the military. But they're pushing them in a direction where there is something positive at the end of the rope." (Principal)

"But the kids that seem to succeed have got role models...whether it's their parents or some other members of the family, mentors of some sort that they can look up to, and they steer them in the right direction." (Principal)

Additional Issues Not Shared by All Groups

Participants mentioned several additional elements that may contribute to Latino students' academic success. These included: supportive teachers and other staff, a student's ability to stay away from negative peer influences, an individual's ability to seek specific support when needed, the availability of interesting activities and opportunities that provided positive experiences, a generally supportive environment, and a certain level of academic skills.

Supportive Teachers and Other Staff

- Participants credited supportive teachers with helping to facilitate academic success. These teachers were described as providing encouragement, taking the time to explain concepts, keeping things in simple terms, and providing individual attention after class. The individual teachers and their classes were also described as interesting and "fun." Students perceived teachers as being supportive when they expressed a personal interest in seeing students learn and/or demonstrated an understanding of the Latino student experience and a willingness to go the "extra mile" to help each individual student.

"They show interest. They say we are lucky to speak two languages. I feel proud of it." (High achiever)

"When the teacher explains it to you and you get it, you get to help someone else and feel good." (At-risk)

"I like it when the teachers come to you and explain everything in words you can understand, instead of using big words." (At-risk)

"Our teachers are our parents away from home." (High achiever)

"I think the Mexican teachers are good because they can relate to you. They have patience. They know parents don't speak very good English." (At risk)

- Parents perceived teachers as being in a position to mentor students and believed that by setting standards of behavior, administering discipline, and taking the time to guide children, they promote educational achievement.

"Schools don't give a moral education, teaching morals at home is not enough." (Parent)

- Other school personnel were also mentioned by students as important influences on their decision to stay in school. In particular, participants mentioned counseling as an important source of encouragement for students to stay in school and obtain their diploma.

"I thought about dropping out a lot last year. I talked to my Mom and everything. She started crying and I came to my guidance counselor and she helped me." (At-risk)

"I had a car accident in 9th grade and I didn't want to come to school in a wheelchair. I was very behind. Ms. _____ [A guidance counselor] saw me one day I came and she said she had to talk to me... so I did summer school, day school and night school, and I am doing good now." (At risk)

Staying Out of Trouble

- Students mentioned that their ability to stay out of trouble was key to doing well in school. Those students who avoid negative peer groups, recognize that there are consequences to their actions, and make efforts to use good behavior, were perceived as being more successful academically. High achievers commented that successful students make every effort to avoid "troublemakers," follow the school rules, and spend time with a positive peer group. Similarly, parents commented that successful students exhibit appropriate behavior, such as self-discipline and trustworthiness. Principals described these students as those who can "bond" with adults, tend to be vivacious and

outgoing, and feel it is "okay" to have good grades. They were also described as "nice kids" who are "well-rounded" and take pride in what they do.

"You got to mind your own business and avoid troublemakers...stay out of it [trouble] because they can bring you into it." (High achiever)

"You cannot stay out of trouble, but you can try by doing what the teachers say and treating them with respect." (High achiever)

"I stay busy, and don't hang around people who are in trouble. I don't have time to get in trouble." (High achiever)

Positive Connection to School Through Activities/Participation

- Participants agreed that positive connections to school were important for students to develop a sense of belonging and to help them see beyond the hard work and challenges they encounter. Students frequently credited interesting and motivating activities in school and after school as keeping them involved. They believed that students who enjoy school, find classes interesting, and try to learn something new every day or engage in fun activities, are more likely to stay in school. Some also mentioned the positive influence of smaller class sizes, which increase the opportunity for class discussion. Principals and teachers emphasized the importance of students engaging in extracurricular activities.

  "They're pretty much involved in activities...athletics, intramurals, clubs, student council. They're sort of part of the school, in a sense." (Principal)

  "If the children are successful socially, they can be successful in school. They need to have extracurricular activities." (Teacher)

- High achieving students commented that successful students tend to be involved both academically and socially in school, participating in extracurricular activities, including clubs and sports, while also completing their homework and assignments.

  "Clubs give you confidence to talk in front of groups." (High achiever)

- Principals agreed that successful students tend to participate in after school activities, take advantage of the opportunities offered to them through school, interact with administrators, show respect for authority, and generally demonstrate a level of comfort in being involved in school. Some of these students work in the office at school, while others are proactive about their education, asking to be placed in specific courses, such as honors class.

"I think the ones who are serious and want an education stand out. They stand out and they stand a little above the others, I mean, they don't have time for the foolishness. It's like they're here on a mission." (Principal)

Ability to Function Cross-Culturally

- Principals perceived successful students as being able to engage people of other cultures without losing their own, thereby becoming more "acculturated" or "Americanized." Some commented that these students "blend in" and have "good personalities". It was suggested that students who can interact with people of other cultures tend to do better. Successful students were described as speaking English with one another regularly and seeking out role models, mentors, and other community support systems that help them make choices that will move them toward success. Teachers tended to believe that country of origin and migrant status have an impact on student involvement in school. They commented that those students coming from more disadvantaged countries were more likely to embrace the opportunities available to them. Others commented that "true" migrant students are more motivated, having the desire to make a good impression.

"I think one of the key factors that's keeping kids in school, and once again, with the Hispanic kids, would be a sense of belonging to what's going on." (Principal)

"They blend in with everybody, they get along, they have great personalities, they do their work, they come to school, they're disciplined. They just do a great job, because they blend in, they fit in with everybody else." (Principal)

Academic Skills and Awareness of Supports

- Principals, district school administrators, other educators and community members identified study skills and English language skills as critical to Latino student's success.

"Kids that have done all right, they kind of know where they're going; they've gotten over the top of that hump so to speak. They're doing okay in school now, they speak English well enough that they can communicate clearly, they're doing okay test-wise, as far as passing state tests, and, you know, for all practical purposes they're Americanized." (Principal)

- Participants pointed out that successful students and their families have greater awareness of the availability of resources and opportunities, such as scholarships and were aware of procedures for accessing them. Principals specifically mentioned that students who remain in the community rather than migrating were more likely to be aware of available supports.

School Social Environment and Safety

- Parents believed that in order to achieve, students must feel safe in school, reporting that incidences of violence in their child's school were contributing to absenteeism. High achievers indicated that the school itself can promote academic success, by enforcing rules against negative behaviors, such as fighting, while providing incentives to students who do well.

  "I like this school because there are no fights. They have rules for that." (High achiever)

Possible Contributors to Latino Student Dropout

Participants consistently identified the following factors as being important contributors to Latino student dropout. These factors emerged as the major themes in this topic area, and are presented in no particular order.

Participants perceived several factors as contributing to Latino student dropout, with no one factor receiving clear emphasis over another. Rather, they attributed a student's decision to drop out to a wide variety and possibly a combination of factors that may be unique to each student. As with success, students, parents, teachers, and the schools were all believed to have the potential to contribute to student dropout. Participants most consistently identified the following factors as influencing student dropout: poor student/teacher relationships; a lack of support and even pressures from parents and peers; language and cultural barriers between the students and their peers as well as school personnel; school system issues and policies; and a student's personal motivation and choice of peer associations.

Lack of Student Motivation

- Participants agreed that a student's level of personal motivation influences his/her academic outcomes. High achievers described unmotivated students as those that do not ask questions in class, skip school, and fail to take school seriously. Teachers commented that these students regularly show up late for class or not at all. All participants tended to agree that those who are not motivated academically are "looking for the easy life," and prefer to make easy money by selling drugs or stealing, or simply prefer watching television or hanging out with their friends to schoolwork. Participants described migrant and immigrant students as being frustrated by having to move from one school to another, while other students reportedly suffer low self-esteem, preventing them from trying to achieve. Parents specifically commented on the tendency of some students to continue the cycle of dependence on welfare that they learned from their parents.

"You have a very small group of ones that are not able to comply with rules and regulations, so they have a hard time with school, of course they'll have a hard time with jobs, too." (Principal)

"My son is a little rebellious. He is not a man and not a boy...sometimes he skips classes and doesn't pay attention to his teachers." (Parent)

"Hanging out until 3 a.m. and then we wake up to go to school and we don't want to go." (At-risk) "We have a problem with tardiness and invariably it is the Hispanic students that come in late more often. Peer pressure to do poor is in their population.Aconsistent thing I have seen is the coming in late. Coming in late isdirectly related to academic performance. They have a lack of dedication, those that come in later.

"We start thinking if they don't care about coming in late, why should I care about explaining it again." (Teacher)

"There is no aspiration. They don't see a door for opportunity." (Teacher)

NEGATIVE PEER ASSOCIATIONS AND SCHOOL ENVIRONMENT

- When asked to identify factors contributing to dropping out, peer pressure and negative peer associations was a recurrent theme among students, parents, and teachers. At-risk students reported receiving pressure from their peer group to drop out, with some peers accusing them of "becoming white" when they chose to remain in school. Some students were perceived as having a desire to be popular and therefore hang out with the "wrong crowd," while others have difficulty fitting in and are bothered when other students "gossip" about them. In addition, students are reportedly laughed at and picked on, many times because of their language and clothing. High achieving students believed that associations with negative peer groups, along with gang involvement, fighting and a generally aggressive school environment all contribute to the decision to drop out, especially because students just want to "belong."

"I don't like it when people talk trash." (At-risk)

"I just don't go out if I know my friends are going to get in trouble." (High achiever)

"I know a lot of people that are smart, but have sisters and brothers in gangs and they want to be in one too." (High achiever)

"I think the girls have a rougher time in school than the guys. And I don't know if it's related to the Hispanic gangs, but they want to be tougher. They want to fight more. They're more territorial, and they're quicker to say 'That's it. I'm done. I don't want to be here.'" (Principal)

Lack of Parental Support

- Participants agreed that lack of parental support can have an influence on a student's decision to drop out. Some parents expressed regret that they were unable to support their children's completion of homework, due to their own lack of education and limited English language skills. Participants also charged some parents with a failure to emphasize academic success, and demanding that their children leave school to pursue employment and address the economic needs of the family. High achievers specifically indicated that problems at home made concentration at school difficult. Several parents reasoned that they lack the time to keep track of their children's school attendance and performance, due to demanding work schedules, which also left little time to help with homework.

  "If the parents don't make it [education] important, then kids are not going to consider it important." (Teacher)

  "The oldest child is forced to do everything." (High achiever)

  "Parents are lax, they let kids stay at home rather than forcing them to go to school." (High achiever)

Sub-group emphases:

- Teachers and parents agreed that in some cases parents are not involved or lack control over their children, failing to set rules, supervise, or teach children the difference between right and wrong. Some parents were described by teachers as being "too dependent" on teachers, having strained relationships with the schools, or having to deal with family turmoil, which distracted them from supporting their children academically. Parents were perceived as being uninformed as to what the system has to offer them (i.e., scholarships and special programs). When parents have limited English language abilities, students reportedly take on the role of translator, thereby becoming an essential connection between the parent and the outside world. Parents were also described as putting their needs ahead of their children's education, by pressuring them to leave school to translate at a doctor's appointment, or care for younger siblings.

  "Not until parents grow up and be parents will this problem go away." (Parent)

  "If kids don't respect their elders, they don't respect themselves." (Parent)

  "If the kid is not doing well, parents pressure them to drop out to earn money." (Teacher)

- Teachers and principals frequently attributed a Latino student's choice to drop out to their home environments. They perceived these students as lacking role models and

described a division between the values for education at home and in school. Students spoke of stress created by conflict at home and how this affects their school work.

"Sometimes my Dad doesn't come home and I have to worry about my Dad when he doesn't come home." (At-risk)

"Kids are emotionally needy and don't seem to get the amount of nurturing or praise they need at home." (Teacher)

Migratory Lifestyle

- Families that migrate were described by students and school personnel as facing additional challenges because students are moved from one school district to another at critical points in the educational process. This results in loss of credits or their credits not being automatically accepted at their new schools. Teachers and students agreed that this instability causes students to fall behind academically, compounding with each move, as they often enter school late and leave early. Teachers believed that frequent moves inhibit communication between the schools and families, as telephone numbers are often disconnected.

  "Discontinuity takes its toll." (Teacher)

  "The kids are upset because they've worked and don't get credit." (Teacher)

  "I know they have a tendency to pull up and go in the middle of the school year. And they tie no roots to the school." (Principal)

  "I'm never in the same school. I'm losing credits in each school I change." (At-risk)

Poor Student/Teacher Relationships

- Participants agreed that poor relationships between individual students and their teachers can contribute to the decision to drop out. This can include students feeling discriminated against, being labeled as problem students, differences in teaching and learning styles, or cultural differences. Students reported that some teachers influence other teachers' opinions of them, thereby leading them to believe that they are "bad kids." Teachers agreed that in some cases their colleagues have "attitudes" toward specific students and label them as a "problem." For those students, school can become synonymous with failure. The few dropouts that participated in the study charged teachers with embarrassing them and other students in front of their peers and treating them "like babies." Dropouts hold some of their former teachers responsible for "causing problems" that ultimately led to their permanent expulsion from school.

"Some kids are labeled as troublemakers. Teachers have short tolerance with that kid later on." (At-risk)

"If there's a teacher you don't like, or they don't like you, it's gonna get worse and worse until you just don't go [to school]." (High achiever)

SUB-GROUP EMPHASES:

- Students reported suffering discrimination from some teachers who assume they are all in gangs, do not allow them to speak in their native language, and "disrespect" them by getting too close to their faces when they talk. Others reportedly have been told by teachers that they are "stupid" or will never succeed. Students also recounted incidents where teachers "picked on" students and blamed them for unacceptable behavior, when others were responsible. In general, many students believed that some individual teachers are unable to relate to students and that given a poor relationship with a teacher, students will want to leave school. Students also described teachers who fail to provide sufficient instruction or explanation as unsupportive. In some cases, these teachers simply fail to make class interesting, while others were perceived as not caring about the students' education, and failing to spend the time necessary to really help the students learn. Some students charged specific teachers with having "poor" teaching skills.

  "I don't get along with a teacher I have...he says I'm stupid...so I don't pay attention to him." (At-risk)

  "I asked a lot of questions, but they didn't have time to answer just to me." (Dropout)

  "Teachers didn't really care about us. They never put any effort in, treating you like Hispanic people weren't going to amount to anything. They didn't really care if we graduated, and put more effort on the white people. Some teachers were really nice, but most said 'Ah, they're gonna drop out anyway.'" (Dropout)

- Parents, students and teachers agreed that failure on the part of teachers to try to reach Hispanic students, such as using a variety of teaching styles for students who may learn differently or who enter school behind grade-level, contributes to dropping out. Teachers indicated that variability in teaching style is especially important when teaching students with limited English capacity, as they tend to need more than just lecture to understand the lesson.

  "They [teachers] just write the answers on the board." (At-risk)

  "Sometimes we don't understand the stuff [lecture]...Latinos learn differently...sometimes teachers talk too fast and complicated and it gets confusing." (High achiever)

"Some professionals don't expect a lot from those students [Latinos] and you can only get what you expect if that is what you are looking for." (Teacher)

Pressures and Responsibilities Outside of School

- Participants frequently mentioned that students often face responsibilities and pressures outside of school that contribute to their decision to drop out. Specifically, some Latino families face economic issues that cause students to leave school and seek employment. Teachers believed pressure from parents to drop out and earn money is particularly strong when a student is not doing well or has been retained a grade. They also indicated that those students who are both working and going to school find that work often interferes with their school performance. Conversely, participants also agreed that in some cases a student's decision to drop out in favor of employment is based solely on a preference to work and earn money. Dropouts mentioned that leaving school allows them to pursue both employment and an education, through enrollment in GED classes.

  "I dropped out of school to get a job. I can get the GED, go to a junior college or something. It is the same thing." (Dropout)

  "Many students get in co-op programs and get money greedy." (Teacher)

  "Many of those kids just end up dropping out of school just to help their family survive, I mean just to put food on the table. It's, it's a real difficult situation for them. A lot of them...as soon as they are of a working age they will go within their community to seek out employment from other Latinos." (Principal)

- Participants reported that some parents are in need of additional income, or childcare for their young children, and either pressure their children to leave school to care for their children, or support them in the decision. In general, parents perceived other parents as placing their economic and childcare needs above their children's education.

  "The child has to work, is forced to work...this money goes directly to the parents." (Parent)

  "They are working, not for their future, but in order to survive." (Parent)

  "We moved around a lot, in and out of Florida, and there was no time for school, I was working, and it was hard to do school, too." (Dropout)

  "There was too much stuff on my mind...taking care of the family." (Dropout)

Language and Cultural Barriers

- All focus group participants cited race and cultural issues as barriers to the success of Latino students. Racist attitudes on the part of other students, teachers and staff, racial tensions among students, and negative and hurtful stereotypes were three examples. High achievers perceived cultural divisions to exist in schools between whites and Latinos and within Latinos as a group. They also reported that other students envy them (achieving Latino students) because of their success. All students believed that Latinos are stereotyped by their peers and school personnel as gang members, based on their clothing.

  "Each ethnic group has their bad end of it...blacks, whites, Hispanics...and people associate the whole group with that one bad stereotype." (High achiever)

  "I hate it when people say, 'Go back to your country.' I mean, if everyone went back, there would be no one here." (High achiever)

  "It is hard to fit in sometimes because I have an accent. It is the way we speak and dress." (At-risk)

  "Some teachers don't allow Spanish to be spoken in their classroom and say those who don't know English should learn it." (At-risk)

  "I think a lot of times they [students] are left out of the loop. They're not accepted. As a Hispanic...you're not really accepted as a majority and you're not accepted a lot of times as a minority, because I've had Hispanic students to come in and talk to me and they are left out. They say, 'There are certain places we can't go because we're Hispanic, then we can't go in the Black neighborhoods a lot of times because they say you are White.' So they are...caught in the center of everything." (Principal)

Sub-group emphases:

- Students and parents felt that white students were more privileged, because they participate in all activities and they receive lesser punishments in comparison with Latino students. One high achiever specifically described an incident in which a white student received detention, while a Latino student was suspended for the same offense. Other participants perceived teachers as favoring white students and segregating the students by race in the classroom, or instructing students not to speak Spanish in class.

  "A Latino would have the same questions as a white person and the teacher will make the Latino feel dumb...and what's the point of going to school when it lowers your self-esteem?" (High achiever)

"They portray you as being a nobody... to me its not worth it [to join a club]." (High achiever)

"They make stupid clubs like Paragraph Club and Board Game Club. We are Mexican. We don't like board games." (At-risk)

"My daughter feels that her teacher prefers white kids and black kids." (Parent)

- Principals perceived Latinos, along with other groups, to be suffering from the ongoing erosion of the connection to religion and a sense of morals. Another commented that Latino students are not aware that being bilingual increases their opportunities for employment and is a clear asset. Rather than maximizing this asset through education, Latino students were perceived as focusing on the immediate gratification of buying expensive clothes and gold necklaces.

"They don't know what's out there for them career-wise. They don't understand that being bilingual is such a major selling component...especially being in Florida." (Principal)

"There seems to be an immediacy...for the big things...I see my kids wearing FUBU shirts and having tons of gold necklaces...they want the fine things, but it's, 'I want it, I want it now, I want it fast'." (Principal)

- Teachers and principals believed that the lack of contact with academically successful Latino role models made it difficult for male students to value education. They also described a pervasive "macho" approach that makes male students unresponsive to female teachers. The "machismo" culture was also identified by principals as influencing the behavior of male Latino students, specifically that they have difficulty listening to women in school or at home who encourage them academically. Some teachers and principals considered Latino girls to be aggressive, while other thought they were more interested in boyfriends and marriage than in completing school.

"She [female students] has set in her mind that's all she's good for [babies and taking care of her man]." (Teacher)

"There are no role models...particularly Hispanic male roles... There are not too many males working in middle school. The oldest male Hispanic kids have a high distrust about who would help them and who would not help them. " (Teacher)

- Teachers suggested that some children from impoverished regions of Latin America were accustomed to viewing completing the sixth grade as an accomplishment. As a result, families were perceived as expecting little more from their children in terms of education. Teachers also described cases of immigrants coming from countries where school attendance and homework was not a daily requirement and being unable to adjust to the American school system.

"In many countries, going to school is not part of everyday. If the family needs them, they stay with the family." (Teacher)

"They're basically the same type of kid as our regular population. There's not a whole lot of difference other than the language barrier sometimes, as far as their characteristics of being a student." (Principal)

"Sometimes cultures are different and they don't understand the importance of some things. If the child thinks that he's gonna pick strawberries for the rest of his life, there's not a big emphasis in getting a high school diploma because he's going to make just as much money whether he gets a diploma or not. But if that individual's persuasiveness from his home, his family life, would be different...if there are Hispanic doctors, that family is going to persuade that child to do things differently than someone who's out in the field all day." (Principal)

- The existing cultural barriers reportedly become exacerbated when students have difficulty understanding English, which is yet another barrier to Latino students' academic success. Teachers reported that even those students who can speak social English might still fail to comprehend the English used during lectures. One teacher mentioned that in schools and communities with a large Latino population, students do not have to speak English at all, except in their classes and then sometimes only to teachers and other staff. Some parents also identified their own limited English as a barrier to their ability to support their children's success. They reported that they lack understanding of the lessons and fail to understand what is happening with their children in school. In some cases, parents reportedly depend on their children as translators. Teachers agreed that Latino parents generally have difficulty speaking English, with some being unable to read or write in English, while others cannot read or write in any language. This makes it difficult to involve parents in school.

"When I'm the only Hispanic that doesn't speak English, it's hard but you overcome it." (High achiever)

"I have to tell them [Latino students] that it is kind of rude to talk about someone and they don't understand. I don't tell them not speak their language, but it is rude." (Teacher)

"Latino students don't get enough conversational English. They hang out with their own." (Teacher)

"Teachers tell in the hallway not to speak Spanish. Teachers tell you to stop speaking Spanish because they take it as an insult to them. They think we are talking about them." (High achiever)

"And they're not dumb kids by any means, it's just that the language barrier is there, but they're so frustrated with...being placed in classes where there's thirty

or forty other students, they speak very limited English, they don't understand...what's going on around them." (Principal)

Lack of Community Support

- Principals, teachers and community representatives believed that major contributors to Latino school dropout were the family and community environments. This included families having large numbers of children, parents who are separated, and emotional issues related to war in their home country, and attempting to adjust to life as an immigrant in the United States. Families also reportedly face problems accessing resources in the community such as housing, employment, and money for food and clothing. It was felt that despite the schools' efforts to reach and motivate students, Latino families have problems beyond education and the schools lack adequate resources to help. It was suggested that the community needs to connect with schools in order to address these issues.

  "The Hispanic community doesn't have much of a connection with the schools. They tend to accept what the school says...If there is a lack of vision, the community needs to speak up." (District Administrator)

- Several principals, teachers and community representatives mentioned low socioeconomic status and lack of resources as negatively influencing students' academic success. Principals indicated that some Latino students are forced to leave their native countries and arrive with very few resources. Families reportedly are lacking transportation, medical care, and general awareness of American culture. Several principals commented that the schools do not necessarily have the resources to meet these needs and families lack awareness of how to access what is available in the community.

  "Every day is different, a challenge. You come and realize that the population has so many barriers; you have to be flexible, understand their choices and not belittle them." (Teacher)

  "We throw them in situations that...you want them to be successful, but [we] don't want to give them a whole lot of support to where they can be successful. If they don't get it from other family members that may have been here in the States, that speak English, that can help tutor them ...their failure rate's gonna be high." (Principal)

Impact of School System Policies

- All groups talked about the impact of policies such as those related to tardiness, absences, discipline, school resources and placement of students into programs as areas of misunderstanding and disagreement between students, parents and the schools.

SUB-GROUP EMPHASES:

- Parents and principals mentioned several school system issues as having an influence on dropping out. Parents specifically cited the new geographical divisions in the district, which resulted in several students have to change schools, where they reportedly experienced increased disciplinary problems. Parents and principals believed that unreasonable and unachievable educational expectations/benchmarks contribute to Latino student dropouts. Some parents disliked the limitations of the eligibility criteria they or their children must meet to participate in special programs. In one case, a mother had to retain migrant status for her daughter to be eligible for a program, while in another, the students tested too high on aptitude measures to be eligible for assistance. Finally, parents and principals also felt that there is an ongoing lack of communication and miscommunication between parents and the schools. Parents frequently commented that the schools do not make an effort to communicate with the parents unless and until there is a problem with their child. Principals commented on difficulties in reaching parents when phones are disconnected and when there is very low attendance at meetings.

  "They told me that I had to continue working as a farm worker for my daughter to be eligible for programs." (Parent)

  "We're losing them now [because of] the benchmarks, they get frustrated. Part of it is frustration, part of it is, you know, they are challenged..." (Principal)

- Teachers and parents commented that the procedure for ESOL placement lead to including students who do not need language instruction or to students remaining in the program too long and missing out on regular program instruction. Principals described ESOL as moving students through according to county policy.

  "I saw some Hispanic kids that spoke perfect English and they were in the wrong level of English. I don't understand why. Just because they have a Hispanic last name, doesn't mean that they need to be in ESOL 12 years." (Teacher)

  "The ESOL program encourages students to stay too long...they stay because they feel comfortable and like they belong, but it makes it too easy and they don't learn what they need to for college. Students who have been accepted into HCC have to take remedial classes for a year and don't get credit..." (Parent)

  "Our whole county, you lose funding after two years in the program. But they figure if the child has not learned enough language after two years, you're not going to accomplish any [more] and it's more detrimental to them because if [they are] in ESOL, it means they're not getting the regular courses and they're falling behind." (Principal)

- At-risk students reported that the academic credit system makes it difficult for them to keep up with the requirements and described the new absence policy as "too strict".

Although these students perceived summer classes and night school as helpful, they reported that they only count as one-half of a credit, making it difficult to catch up or move ahead. High achievers mentioned the "lock out" tardy policy as keeping students out of class and perceived schools as having too many regulations, including a very strict dress code and an in-school suspension policy that they described as a "reward for poor behavior." They also reported that detention is too full. These students also anticipated that by "raising" their academic standards, schools would force marginal students to "give up."

"I don't go to class because they are going to fail me anyway because of my absences and tardies. They take off points." (At-risk)

- Many students commented on the poor condition of their school environment, stating that the school itself was "run down". They also mentioned that the schools were poorly equipped and that classes were so large that teachers were unfamiliar with their students and therefore could not provide individual attention.

"This is a dirty school. Sometimes it floods...it has old carpet...we have to open the windows and doors to breathe." (High achiever)

- Principals suggested that the attendance and retention policies did not necessarily support student success. Previous attendance policies were described by one principal as "unfair" because they required a doctor's note for absences due to illness and required teachers to take points off of students' grades, which caused them to fall even further behind. The policy being implemented in the 1999/2000 school year was described as more flexible and promoting cooperation between the schools, students and families on absences. The practice of not retaining students who are overage was also suggested as a hindrance to promoting achievement for Latino students.

"It was real hard for us to say you've gotta have a doctor's note or we can't excuse the absence, therefore we're going to take two points off their grade, therefore they're going to get behind, ..., once they get down to a certain level, it's like, 'Why bother, I'm already [behind], I'm done..." (Principal)

"I see the second and third generation here - we've Americanized them, they've learned... that two years in a grade will pass them on, because you can't have a sixteen-year-old fifth grader." (Principal)

ADDITIONAL ISSUES

These topics were themes within sub-groups, and are described here as separate issues. Topics are presented in no particular order.

ACADEMIC DIFFICULTY

- At-risk students, teachers and principals agreed that the academic challenges of school often lead to students dropping out. The students expressed frustration with classes being too difficult, commenting that they become frustrated when they are unable to do the work and "worry" when teachers pressure them academically that they will be in the "same grade forever." As a result, many turn to the GED as a more reasonable or "easier" option, believing that it allows them to obtain an education and move on to employment more rapidly. One principal perceived students as lacking study and critical thinking skills, which leads them to become frustrated and disruptive and ultimately leads to suspension.

  "At-risk kids generally...have similar characteristics. Most are just not successful with school. They've fallen behind somewhere else and get pushed along and pushed along to where they just feel out of the loop." (Principal)

- Teachers perceived many Latino students as lacking basic skills and specifically struggling with history, math and science. Ultimately they fail to pass high school competency tests or meet other academic benchmarks and drop out. These teachers estimated that most Latino students fail these tests at least two or three times before passing. In addition, teachers reasoned that due to their lack of skills, students become increasingly frustrated and overwhelmed, resulting in a high rate of absenteeism. Principals agreed that there is a high rate of absenteeism among students as well as a high grade-retention rate.

  "It's hard for them to make the written connection when they don't write in the native language." (Teacher)

  "There's low attendance, low motivation from the students, a disproportionate amount of retention seems to be [the] Latinos." (Principal)

  "And you know, what better reason to say that I wanna drop out of school, well you told me I'm a failure, here's my report cards for the past year and a half, look at them, they're all F's. Why should I stay in school? I'm not getting anyplace."(Principal)

- Community representatives and parents perceived students as failing to learn necessary academic basics during middle school and high school to attend college or obtain a good paying job. A community representative commented that many students do not even consider college because of economic limitations and lack of awareness of the

availability of scholarships. From his perspective, Latino students are not only failing academically, but they receive little attention from guidance counselors, thereby compounding the problem. At-risk students demonstrated a lack of awareness of the possibility of higher education and talked about the advantages of getting a GED.

"I think GED is a good enough diploma. My brother has a GED and he is doing fine." (At-risk)

School is Uninteresting

- All students tended to describe school as "boring," commenting that there is little to interest them in staying involved. High achievers mentioned that there are few extracurricular activities in school that appeal to Latino students. In addition, teachers perceived the schools as failing to offer classes that interest Latino students, such as drama, dance, and classes such as computers, mechanics, and electronics. Teachers also reported a more striking lack of interest in school on the part of male versus female Latino students and by overage students in lower grades (i.e., a 17 year old in 9th grade).

  "School is hard and boring. It is a place to get out of my house. I like coming to school because of my friends." (At risk)

  "How do you make a child want to come back to school? We have to have something in the schools...something that catches their attention...that they can take ownership in and take pride in...to hook them." (Teacher)

Potential Societal Implications of Latino Student Dropout

Participants agreed that students who drop out of school face a lack of employment opportunities, increase their potential for involvement in illegal activities, and suffer other disadvantages such as early pregnancy and damaged family relationships. There was a great deal of agreement among participants that the absence of a high school diploma and a lack of basic education is likely to result in diminished opportunities in life for students. Facing a lack of opportunities, participants believed that students were more likely to turn to drug use and trafficking as well as other crimes.

Lack of Employment Opportunities

- In general, participants perceived those students who drop out of school to have fewer opportunities in life, specifically to obtain well paying jobs. They also believed it was more likely for migrant dropouts to follow in the footsteps of their parents and become fieldworkers. Participants also believed that dropping out can perpetuate a negative

family tradition that may ultimately lead to involvement in negative, illegal, and/or destructive activities, such as drug use. Some parents related the lack of opportunity to students becoming depressed and withdrawn.

"Most [brothers and parents] don't go to school and they are working and they get money, so I can do the same thing. Well, I want more money, so maybe I can keep going to school." (At-risk)

"My cousin just dropped out and he is now working at Checkers." (At-risk)

"You don't want to be in McDonald's flipping burgers." (High achiever)

- Teachers believed that dropouts may not even have the basic skills for minimum wage jobs, as they will be unable to read or make change. Instead, they expected these students to end up working as "cheap labor" or in the fields. As a result, dropouts were believed to perpetuate the creation of a "permanent under class," with many working in the same kinds of jobs as their parents. The impact on the Latino community was expected to be an unskilled and unprepared workforce, which would ultimately fail to improve opportunities for others in the community. Dropouts were also expected to be the most likely to face language barriers and to be disadvantaged in GED classes if they had not achieved a minimum reading level during school.

"The power structure of Florida perpetuates that [cheap labor] and we are not motivated to change that." (Teacher)

"GED is basically a lot of reading, and if they haven't mastered at least the basics of reading, they're not going to be successful in GED either." (Principal)

Involvement in Illegal Activity

- Participants suggested that societal implications of dropping out included increased involvement in illegal activities, specifically gangs and drugs. One student who had dropped out reported that he had trespassed on school property and was court ordered to attend GED classes. Teachers attributed the involvement in illegal activities to dropouts having large amounts of free time on their hands. One teacher specifically commented that a community near the school has the highest crime rate in the state, and suggested this was the result of teens not having any money and being forced to turn to crime. Another described the area as the "drug pipeline," where drug wars are not uncommon. These activities were also blamed for causing distrust and fear in the community.

"I have friends that do drugs and dropped out of school." (At-risk)

"The kids are emulating behavior that gives them status because they are not getting status as students." (Teacher)

"They get into jobs which are menial and have no advancement. You eventually reach a level of frustration. You can't support your family, you don't have a house, you are still renting. I would feel that within a few years this would explode. That would be the time for crime, but this is only a guess." (Teacher)

"Money is important and if they can't make money legally, they turn to drugs and the drug pipeline." (Teacher)

LIMITED EDUCATIONAL ALTERNATIVES

- Principals commented that alternative opportunities for education, such as GED and night school do not offer the same type or level of support that the middle and high schools offer. There are no bilingual teacher's aides in night school, leaving students without additional help with their English language skills.

  "Well, there's a variety of things that they try and some of them go on to night school...and again, at night school I think they're probably in worse shape than they are in day school, because they don't even have the bilingual teacher aides in classes." (Principal)

  "Some of them, you run into them once in a while. It's sort of a mixed bag, some are basically on the street, some have gone back and have gotten a GED, some have gone to trade school or have learned a trade, so it's a mixed bag. Some have become grownups and had families." (Principal)

- Participants identified various other consequences of dropping out for families and communities, such as teen pregnancy, and unproductive behaviors such as boredom, inactivity and laziness. A few at-risk students recognized that if they were to drop out, they would be going against their parent's wishes, which could damage their relationship. A community participant believed that dropping out of school could lead to a lack of culture, values, and traditional practices and therefore the future of humanity depend on education.

  "Again, I think they drop out of high school and...I'm not so much sure if it's a trying to convince themselves or their parents, 'Well, let me just try this other program.' When in reality all they're really trying to do is run away from, you know, run away from the whole educational system." (Principal)

Existing Educational Programs and Resources Addressing the Needs of At-Risk Latino Students

A wide variety of existing educational programs and resources were identified by participants as addressing the needs of at-risk Latino students. Table 17 below presents the resources mentioned by those that are specifically for Latino students and those that are available for the larger student body.

Table 17 – Latino Student Resources

Resources Specifically for Latino Students	Resources Not Specifically for Latino Students
Club Arriba	International Club
Latin Quarters	Community service projects
Impacto	Park recreation center
ESOL	Remediation and tutoring (after school)
HEP (USF Migrant Institute)	Intensive Learning Alternatives Program (ILAP)
In-school Migrant Program	ROTC
Flamenco Dancing	Health Occupations Services Association (HOSA)
Migrant Referral Center	Leadership Program
Redlands Christian Migrant Association (RCMA)	Impact
AHEC Camp (USF College of Public Health)	Job Training Partnership, operation C.O.L.L.E.G.E.
Occupational Specialists Program for Latino Students	HIPPY
Latino Student College Scholarships	Vocational classes
Bilingual Personnel	"Success Group" (minority students)
San Jose Mission	Counseling
Beth-El Mission	Transportation
Migrant Awards Program	The Great American Teach-In
Direct Phone Line for Migrant Parents to Migrant Advocate	
Even Start	
Job Training Partnership	
Gifts to Migrant children (through donations)	

- Students mentioned activity-oriented clubs, including Club Arriba, Impacto, International Club, and Latin Quarters as being important resources. However, despite their availability, student mentioned that involvement in clubs and sports is often predicated upon good grades, selection by teachers, application for membership, and a membership vote, which can be intimidating. Students also mentioned that they were not made aware of opportunities to join until it was too late. At-risk students and high achievers tended to perceive clubs differently. For example, at-risk students commented that Club Arriba requires a GPA of 2.0 and does not teach Latino culture or provide anything helpful to students, while high achievers perceived the club as providing students an opportunity to "bond" with and be a source of support for other Latinos. In one school, a Latino service club was described as not very active, while in another school an international club was considered to be helpful because it was made up of mostly Mexican students.

  "To be in a club, you have to have a 2.0 [GPA], you can't have been referred...I never bothered because my grades aren't good enough." (High achiever)

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"There are clubs with no Hispanics in them and that's just where we've got to be persistent to get in." (High achiever)

"When I found out [about a certain club], it was too late [to join]." (High achiever)

"There are programs, but there is no place for Hispanics. We are the last ones to find out about them." (At-risk)

"There is nothing for Latinos. We are just in the middle." (Dropout)

- Teachers and principals reported that clubs encourage students to become involved in community service projects, such as providing food for the hungry, working with agricultural families, and buying presents for poor children. One principal credited some teachers with making the extra effort to recruit Latino students for Club Arriba or other activities in school. They also identified transportation as a resource, yet indicated that it is not available for all programs. A few indicated that some schools are simply resource-poor and therefore do not offer structured programs.

"When you're at home and bored, it's tempting to go out on the streets and get into trouble." (High achiever)

- Participants mentioned the availability of a variety of programs designed to assist students academically, including computer classes, tutoring, and homework and language assistance. They specifically mentioned ESOL, ROTC, the Health Occupations Services Association (HOSA), Leadership Program, Impact, and the Intensive Learning Alternatives Program (ILAP). Impact was described by high achievers as a remediation program involving students in self-directed work, usually on computers. The program helps students who have fallen behind earn enough credits to graduate. ILAP (a dropout prevention program) provides specialized attention in small classes.

"Mostly[I use] the computers. When I am in the computer, I get my mind off things." (At-risk)

"The benchmarks have really posed a bit of a problem for them [Latino students], so we're doing a lot of remediation..." (Principal)

- Teachers in East and South county schools frequently mentioned the importance of the HEP program (USF migrant institute), with one teacher describing it as "phenomenal" because it gives younger students a chance to succeed academically. Some students have found the paperwork required for enrollment in HEP to be an insurmountable barrier. Teachers and other school personnel perceived students as failing to take advantage of the programs designed to support the academic success of Latino students, including tutoring through the Redlands Christian Migrant Association (RCMA), the Job Training Partnership, operation C.O.L.L.E.G.E. (a literacy and GED program), HIPPY, and Even Start.

"In the migrant program, I stay after school and they help me with my homework." (High achiever)

"The programs that I've seen affecting them [Latino students] the most are Chapter One programs, where a lot of the migrant money comes from, the migrant grant money. Our migrant advocate program is really strong...and our program to some extent helps the community with their needs." (Principal)

- Participants generally agreed that tutoring and other after school academic programs, as well as English classes for parents have been helpful in supporting their child's academic success. Principals credited the RCMA with providing mentors, tutoring, computer training, field trips, rewards and incentives.

"The problem with the after school program is that kids have jobs after school, or have to baby sit." (Teacher)

"We have flamenco dancing going on during the summer and in our after school program. We try to find things that... this is what's important to your culture." (Principal)

- Participants' discussion of the strengths and weaknesses of the ESOL program seems to indicate some disagreement or confusion about the purposes and goals of the program. Parents and teachers reported that students can be inappropriately placed in ESOL simply because they are Latino rather than because they need additional English language instruction. Parents were concerned that when more "advanced" students are mixed with limited English speakers in ESOL the latter tend to "get lost." Both teachers and parents felt that the program addresses the need to be able to speak English to survive, while failing to address higher academic skills. Principals considered ESOL to be the main way in which limited English speaking students' needs could be addressed. Some parents assumed that ESOL classes were only for immigrants or migrants and were therefore negative about the inclusion of students who did not fit either of these profiles.

"There's not a whole lot... beyond the ESOL program itself, there really isn't any other support system that I can think of out there for these students." (Principal)

"The ESOL program in [one] High School has people there that are not immigrants." (Parent)

"The ESOL program obviously affects all students that have another language spoken at home. There's not a whole lot of flexibility in the implementation of the program, per se. We try to be flexible in meeting the individual student needs." (Principal)

"Our ESOL kids, in their [ESOL] journalism class... it's unreal the poems they've written and published." (Principal)

- Principals described a wide variety of programs as being available to both Latino students and larger student body. One mentioned a club called the "success group," which provides minority students a forum to discuss how to be successful in life. In another school, the Occupational Specialist offers a program that involves Latino students in speaker programs and club meetings in the neighborhoods. One principal indicated that his school was offering vocational education and electives, such as agriculture, cosmetology, business, and carpentry. He perceived these electives as addressing at-risk Latino students' need to learn a trade and increase their employability. Other schools provide transportation for the after-school program, bring in speakers periodically to address the student body through the Great American Teach-In, offer awards dinners, and use donated funds to provide gifts for migrant children.

- Some students have access to the community college admission and scholarship information through a Latino representative that visits high schools. The community college also offers a public access program for bilingual students concerning admissions and financial aid, and a website in Spanish. Latino students are also supported through the partnerships with local employers for programs such as paid internships for bilingual AS graduates.

  "You need to advise the complete family. When I see Americans, they don't come with their parents, but the Hispanics, they come with their parents." (Community college representative)

School Staff as Resources

Staff Identified as Resources for Latino Students
• Latino and bilingual teachers
• Latino and bilingual teacher's aides
• Latino and bilingual staff
• Latino truancy officers
• Latino principals
• Latino assistant principals
• Occupational specialists
• Guidance counselors
• Teachers (including those who volunteer time)
• Bilingual counselors
• Resource specialists
• Migrant advocates
• Latino male mentors
• Volunteers (Read America)
• ESOL teachers

- Most participants mentioned that particular individuals in the schools serve as a resource and support to Latino students. A variety of Latino and/or bilingual administrators,

teachers, staff and paraprofessionals were particularly important to students and frequently mentioned by participants. Students specifically mentioned Latino police officers, principals, assistant principals, and guidance counselors, commenting that they can relate to these individuals and feel understood by them. Principals also indicated that supportive relationships have developed between Latino students and office staff, faculty, teacher's aides, truancy officers, and Occupational Specialists.

"The Latino cop tries to help you... he's as cool as hell." (At risk)

"We probably have one of the higher Hispanic populations as far as teachers go...I think there need to be role models. Also the parents sometimes feel more comfortable dealing with a teacher of similar background." (Principal)

"They've got to feel welcome and you have to sort of work at it. You can't force everybody into the same mold." (Principal)

"I also have a truancy officer through another grant, that is bilingual, and he goes out to the houses and has done real well with the parents because a lot of the parents are like, 'I can't make him go to school.' But then he's on campus, so he'll go and make sure that they're here and kinda do a little, you know, interaction, so it's a [truancy] slash mentoring program, too." (Principal)

- Participants credited teachers, staff and volunteers with providing critical support for students, including translation. These individuals reportedly help students build their self-esteem, by demonstrating positive attitudes, showing students respect, and serving as positive role models. Several principals credited their faculty with treating all students with respect. They were described as caring, enthusiastic, energetic, having a good self-esteem, being comfortable with bilingual students, and generally dedicated to making all students successful. One teacher emphasized the importance of volunteers through the Read America program, which involves retired educators, business people, and USF faculty. Teacher's aides, especially those who are bilingual, and Latino male mentors were also identified as important student resources. These individuals assist students with their schoolwork and help to improve their test scores. In addition to supporting the students during school hours, some conduct outreach to Latino parents.

"The key is everyone joining together... You need to join hands with others. Kids need a little extra, they need a sense of belonging, to build their self-esteem and give a sense of direction." (Teacher)

"ESOL and ILAP teachers are good...ILAP classes are smaller, only 15 students, they concentrate more on you and they hardly get you in trouble. The teacher knows what you are going through...they are more real, tell you straight forward." (At risk)

- Principals named resources such as bilingual guidance counselors and a guidance resource specialist that helps identify scholarships for students. In addition, assistant

teachers have been hired by some schools to work with students on preparation for benchmark testing.

"We brought in two additional teachers, assistant teachers, strictly to work with test scores with those kids on HSCT, and we did, we got a... we have over the years gotten the vast majority of those kids through HSCT." (Principal)

- Principals and teachers frequently mentioned the pivotal role of the Migrant Advocate plays in supporting the efforts of some Latino students. The role of the Migrant Advocate is described as conducting outreach to migrant families and working closely with the teachers and Latino parents. Other duties mentioned include: helping with homework in the after school program, following up with parents on attendance, conducting home visits, assisting with remediation, offering child rearing classes for parents, and referring Latino students to ESOL or special education. A few principals indicated that their school offers a direct phone line for migrant parents to contact the migrant program staff and that they provide all printed communications to Latino families in both Spanish and English.

"The best programming decision was to have resource teachers that coordinate, linking home and community, designing adult programs and workshops for parents, and validating parents as primary teachers of their children." (District Administrator)

"The big link is through the parents. The Migrant Advocate does this." (Principal)

"Her [Migrant Advocate's] whole program is to get them into the ESOL program and get them out. Get them mainstreamed. Learn the language. And let's move them on to the higher level."

Specific Social Service Needs of Latino Students Not Currently Being Met

- A wide variety of needs emerged for Latino students, not all of which were specific to social services. In fact, participants emphasized the importance of parental involvement with their students, the presence of supportive teachers, additional Latino or bilingual (Spanish-speaking) staff, Latino mentors, and role models. Similarly, there was a clear need for improved communication between the schools and both the students and their parents. For those parents and students who are aware of the available programs and services, many reportedly need assistance accessing them through a change in the hours of operation or provision of transportation. Students specifically expressed a need for better access to academic supports and a need to decrease barriers to participating in clubs and sports.

- Additional barriers included strict policies concerning absences and tardies. These policies reportedly result in some Latino students falling behind academically. Many were described as being unable to catch up on credits through night or summer school, causing them to give up. A number of participants also reported that the current benchmarks for academic achievement post a significant barrier for Latino students.

Need for Interesting Activities

- Many students described an academic environment that was uninteresting and indicated that school should be more "fun." They would like to see the schools increase the number of activities, clubs, and recreational opportunities for Latino students. High achievers specifically expressed an interest in more clubs like Club Arriba, that focus on bringing together students with a common cultural background. Students would also like teachers to make classes more interesting, by incorporating more interaction and discussion into the lessons. Teachers and principals agreed that students need additional opportunities to react in a recreational environment, believing that these interactions could help decrease peer tensions. One participant specifically mentioned a need for additional sports fields, while others suggested leagues that encourage parent involvement. Specific sports were mentioned by teachers, including boxing, wrestling and karate, which teachers believed could teach respect, discipline and structure. Others commented that students could benefit by becoming involved with special programs like the agriculture club or military and that non-academic programs, such as summer camp can make school seem more "fun."

  "School can't be all fun, but a little bit is okay." (At-risk)

  "We make an effort to come here every morning, at least make it fun." (At-risk)

  "If they are involved in more extracurricular activities,they don't have time to get in trouble." (Teacher)

  "How can we make them love school?"(Teacher)

  "Students are also in need of more recreational facilities and activities, including summer dancing programs in the community. There also need to be other clubs outside of school thar provide field trips to events and other recreational outings" (Principal)

- A number of participants indicated that some students may need some support and encouragement becoming involved in clubs and activities in school that are not geared specifically toward Latino students. A few high achievers expressed some initial discomfort with some programs, because they were the only Latino students involved.. A few participants also suggested offering a class about Latino culture, while others perceived a need to formally disseminate information to students regarding the opportunities available, rather than relying on word of mouth.

"Kids here are not informed." (High achiever)

"I want to be involved in soccer or music, but I don't understand the language." (At-risk)

"I was in soccer but there were a lot of white people. They didn't know how to play. I felt like I was the only one who knew how to play." (At risk)

PARENTAL INVOLVEMENT

- At-risk students and teachers emphasized the importance of increasing parental involvement. Migrant students indicated that they need encouragement from parents and believed that their parents are in a position to provide some exposure to the realities of working in the fields, thereby helping them understand the potential consequences of dropping out of school. Both at-risk students and teachers perceived parent involvement as a critical need that is not currently being met and agreed that the schools should create a "bridge" to the homes of Latino students. Improved access to the schools for parents was also identified as a need. Specifically, it was mentioned that groups, conferences, and meetings should be scheduled to coordinate with parents' work schedules, and information should be provided in Spanish. Teachers also suggested providing parenting classes, or support groups, and believed the school should make an effort to communicate to parents the benefits of education. Parents felt that schools should support parent's efforts to teach morals, take responsibility for students during the day, and keep parents informed.

  "Make it worth it for us. Tell us we are doing good [student to parents]." (At-risk)

  "Parents need to take time off to spend with kids." (At-risk)

  "Parents are afraid of disciplining their kids because of HRS." (Teacher)

  "They need classes on parenting so they can help their kids. We should offer something like education and involvement of parents." (Teacher)

  "Mom sometimes screams at home... then I like school." (At risk)

- Principals and ESOL teachers agreed that parents need to be more involved in their children's education. One identified a greater need for structured after school activities for students, indicating that Latino parents tend to work more than one job and therefore are not home when students leave school. They also recommended adding personnel who can assist in communicating with Latino parents through mailings and newsletters in several languages, a task described as "labor intensive." Principals identified a need for additional bilingual aides and a liaison to work specifically with

Latino students and parents. If additional staff were available, one principal believed it would be important to spend time calling parents regarding their student's attendance.

"We have parent meetings here...you're gonna get a handful of parents that are gonna come...but the majority of those people don't come. And, you know, it's hard to say sometimes, because we had a meeting in a church and it was publicized for weeks and in the paper and sent home things with all these kids and I think we had six people, and it was in their community and their church and on their turf. So, I don't know how to get them to come." (Principal)

"Provide money to feed parents for support groups and meetings." (Teacher)

"We need to integrate people, make them feel good about themselves, then we can work together." (ESOL Teacher)

ACADEMIC SUPPORT

- High achievers mentioned a need for additional academic assistance for Latino students, specifically homework assistance, teacher's aides, and after school programs. They also would like to see classes offered to dropouts, designed to allow them to earn their high school diplomas. One suggested a "homework" hotline, while another recommended establishing a tutoring program that uses students as the tutors. Teachers recommended offering language immersion courses for students who know very little English, as well as GED classes in Spanish, and improved ESOL placements based on need.

  "I have problems with kids that have no knowledge of English language. You don't want to fail the student because it is not fair, but I feel frustrated." (Teacher)

  "We don't offer GED in Spanish. Some schools do. It is overwhelming sometimes, because it is easier for them to go to regular school than to take GED English. Sometimes we don't see them again. They don't understand how important English is." (Teacher)

- Principals suggested providing specialized courses, such as study skills and critical thinking, for ESOL students. One believed it might be helpful to have a team reviewing each Latino student's progress and making placement recommendations for ESOL. This principal equated the approach to the Child Study Team for Special Education. A community representative identified the need for an organization focused on building a Latino leadership group and involving them in educating the community. He felt that this organization should take on the role of mentoring Latino students toward success. In general, this participant perceived the Latino population as needing to become more organized, united and aggressive.

"I still think that there are some educational things that need to be done for these kids, especially when they first get here...I think putting them into two ESOL classes a day and dumping in four other mainstream classes just is not fair to them. They need something else for that first three months, six months, whatever, to help them assimilate quicker and pick up more English...What I might like to see being done is [to] give those kids study skills courses, [like] critical thinking skills, those types of courses...After a semester or a year maybe...where they've gotten their feet on the ground and they know someEnglish, now woll start putting them into courses that their gonna need for credit."(Principal)

"English, now we'll start putting them into the courses that they're gonna need for credit." (Principal)

Latino/Bilingual Staff and Cultural Awareness/ Sensitivity

- Participants mentioned the need for more Latino and or Spanish-speaking (bilingual) teachers and administration. At-risk students specifically perceived these individuals as being more likely to understand them. Along the same lines, students and teachers would like to see an improvement in the cultural competence of all school personnel. High achievers suggested eliminating staff members that do not accept different races. Others recommended having a Spanish-speaking teacher for every subject and offering all courses in an entirely bilingual setting. Teachers believed there could be some benefit in teachers taking classes to learn Spanish as part of their continuing staff development. They specifically perceived a need for additional male Latino teachers as well as role models that could serve as visiting speakers during school hours.

"It's helpful to have people in the same situation....they understand." (High achiever)

"It (Hispanic culture and history) should almost be a subject, so many have the background, but many studnets don't know about their own background." (Teacher)

"We look at our multiculturalism here as an asset, not a liability. We're not afraid to admit we have a large Hispanic population. We're not afraid to admit we have a lot of minority populations." (Principal)

"Create more cross-cultural activities." (Teacher)

"We need 'real' cultural sensitivity training, not just for inservice points, but teachers go because they need to know, to gain an awareness of why people act the way they do" (Teacher)

"I don't believe in cultural diversity. You have to look at what keeps us together." (Teacher)

Mentors and Other Supportive Personnel

- In addition to needing Latino or bilingual staff, students mentioned a need for staff and teachers who are "caring" people. More specifically, they expressed a need for someone to mentor, motivate, advise and encourage them. They also need staff that can communicate the importance of education and the consequences of dropping out. Possible candidates for such positions would be students who initially dropped out of school, but returned after seeing how a lack of education limited their opportunities. One suggested a big brother/big sister program on campus, while another would like the school to have a parent liaison that can speak to parents when they call the school inquiring about their children.

  "I need someone to relate to." (High achiever)

  "We need to break the ice between teachers and students." (High achiever)

  "Most students do speak English. It is about being genuine. I don't think speaking Spanish is a requirement. With the parents, yeah, but with the kids it is different." (Teacher)

  "Have more Spanish teachers, people that can get along with them [Latino students]." (Dropout)

  "School needs more 'listeners', it needs people who listen and give students their undivided attention." (High achiever)

  "The teacher's approach needs to be one of real vested interest, not just their job. They have to care. We need to get all teachers to care, to understand every student; they should all try. Students know if you've tried." (Teacher)

- Given the importance of the Migrant Advocates in the schools, many principals and teachers suggested expanding the position to address the needs of all Latino students, not just migrants. The Migrant Advocate facilitates families' involvement in the school system by creating a bilingual contact point in the schools for parents and an awareness of important cultural issues. High school teachers recommended that Migrant Advocates change their approach to students, which they perceived as involving "spoon feeding" students too much. They believed that students need to be nurtured less, as the current approach fails to prepare students for work or post secondary education.

  "*I think they need more (migrant) advocates in the schools. If you put to more advocates in there I think the job would be spread more. You know theres only one person, and she can only do so much in a twenty-four hour period." (Principal)*

- Principals also identified a need for Latino school consultants, and other Latino mentors for both families and children. One would like to see a list developed identifying Latino

role models from the health care professions who are willing to come speak in the schools on a variety of relevant issues, including child welfare, medical care, and mental health issues for Latinos. Latino businessmen/women who are willing to share their success stories and impress students with the importance of the work ethic would also be helpful.

"I think if we had a full time Resource Teacher, that could help these students. I'm sure there's other ways that we would find that we could help students if we just had someone on staff that could work more, you know, if that was one hundred percent their job, of working with that group and dealing with those situations." (Principal)

Information and Better Communication

- Participating parents frequently identified a need for better two-way communication with the schools, specifically information that is communicated directly from the schools, rather than through their children. Parents felt that they were not sufficiently informed about school decisions and actions regarding their children. Improved communication was described as being notified of changes in behavior and discussing reasons for truancy. Principals agreed that information needs to be more effectively disseminated to parents, specifically addressing who they should contact with questions, including their phone numbers. Other parents described language and/or cultural barriers that made them feel unwelcome in the schools or misunderstood by staff. They suggested that the schools communicate with Latino parents in both Spanish and English, be less condescending, and stop blaming parents for their children's behavior. Rather, they would like to see the schools pay better attention to the needs of the children and families and offer more help. A few participants perceived the current school system to be unfriendly to Latino families, causing them to feel inferior, due to their low education, and limited English. As a result, they suffer a lack of self-esteem and the perception that they are the "lowest on the totem pole" in the community.

  "They assume that because I don't speak English that I am stupid." (Parent)

  "They have to talk to the parents to make sure they want their child in ESOL." (Parent)

  "They should not wait for them to get into trouble, but should help out before they get in trouble, not just after. You can't go back and fix it." (Parent)

- Parents and principals agreed that Latino parents need to be better informed concerning how they can best promote their children's success in school. Other parents believed that the schools should consult and address them as a group, regardless of race or language, implying that Latino parents are regularly separated as a group in their relationship or communications with the schools. Parents also agreed that the schools should take into consideration their work hours when scheduling meetings and offering programs and services.

"Most parents work and see their kids only at night. During the day they are in school, and that's the best place to help. They should think about kids as if they were on their own, as their own children, who might be in trouble some day, and ask would someone be there for them?" (Parent)

"I think [we need] more intense parenting classes: how to raise your children, how to guarantee success for your children and if your child has a problem who to go to; because when you're in a culture where you don't speak the language and your child's having problems, a lot of times they just sit at home because they don't know where to turn, that there's someone there for them." (Principal)

"Let them know that all this help is available for their children." (Principal)

"The parents work for food and necessities, they just need a little extra help to make kids behave." (Parent)

Increased Access to Services and Programs

- In addition to improved communication, participants agreed on the need for better dissemination of information concerning available programs and services. In certain schools, this was identified as being a serious unmet need. Teachers suggested that they need to be informed about what services are available through the school system. Students and parents expressed a need for assistance accessing programs and services through improved transportation and timely information that is bilingual. Both parents and teachers agreed on the importance of outreach, with parents expressing an interest in home visits and outreach by Latino teachers, other school staff, and/or other parents of Latino children. Some participants believed that through outreach, schools could increase positive community involvement and expand teachers' understanding of their students' lifestyles and culture. Currently, outreach is perceived as being negatively oriented and limited to those homes in which students have been in trouble or are failing in school.

  "The Hillsborough County School system is so big, we don't know what resources are available. We need better communication between elementary, secondary and adult education." (Teacher)

  "We have to go to their homes, start knocking on some doors." (Parent)

  "You have to find out about it [programs/services] on your own." (At-risk)

- Principals and community representatives agreed that Latino students need additional information and resources for scholarships and admission to post-secondary education. Principals suggested that students need to become aware of and involved in programs that offer field trips and activities and focus on giving students incentives to achieve short term goals, rather than the long term goal of a college education. A community repre-

sentative indicated that Latino students are generally not aware of the academic scholarships available to them for higher education, nor are they aware of which individuals they should contact at the community college or university that can help them with admissions and/or financial aid questions.

"Because people are coming from different countries, maybe they are here, maybe they are not residents, or they are not citizens, this is one thing. Second thing, they are here but they didn't come with their papers from high school, they don't have it, and if they cannot get it, they need to take the GED." (Community representative)

"They do take the students, for example, out to the University of South Florida and show them what opportunities are available for them, in terms of education. And I think that's admirable, but, that's... for a student that's a freshman in a high school. They need something more tomorrowish, you know...something that they can deal with and see some success tomorrow, next week, next month, rather than, 'Well if I do well five years from now I can end up out at the university.' They need something that's much shorter, much shorter term success." (Principal)

Community Resources and Non-traditional Services

- Participants reported a need to increase the number and capacity of community resources and nontraditional services. It was suggested that successful programs be expanded, such as the USF summer migrant program (HEP), public library services and programs, transportation to school activities, childcare, translation services, and the Lions Club free glasses program. Other suggestions included expanding community supports for parents and families such as outreach by the churches, reading programs, free English learning centers, and assistance for new immigrants in getting jobs and housing. It was suggested that those in the community that employ students should become more involved in their education and that there should be better recognition by the community of Latino student achievements.

  "They need to be served from somewhere outside of school...by church or libraries...teachers are maxed out."(Teacher)

  "I'll have people coming in... from say Cuba and they're gonna live with them for three or four weeks and they're trying to find an apartment for them, they're trying to find jobs for their spouses and so forth. Most of that's just done through the community and through...volunteers. There's nothing... that's actually set up through [the high school] to...find clothes for the kids or find jobs for the families or things of that sort." (Principal)

  "Kids who do well get prizes, but kids who are not doing well need to have someone to pay attention to them too; they should not be neglected." (Parent)

- Dropouts suggested that they would like to be supported in their desire to pursue work. Strategies mentioned included making classes shorter and condensing the length of the school day, offering classes between 10 a.m. and 3 p.m. twice a week. They reasoned that the current school day is not solely focused on academics and that a more condensed schedule would allow students time for other pursuits (including employment). Dropouts and teachers also expressed a need for vocationally-oriented classes, such as auto mechanics, and other courses outside of the "core" academics, including bilingual classes. Several students, teachers, and administrators agreed on the need to improve school facilities and the technology available for instruction. A district administrator suggested offering a longer and more flexible day or establishing alternative schools that focus on moving students forward academically through remediation of basic skills.

  "Most of the time in school is not learning time." (Dropout)

  "School is repetition of what we know." (Dropout)

  "The vocational subjects went out the window with the basics sweep." (Teacher)

- Participants recognized a need for counseling services, with parents suggesting group counseling once a week for children of divorce and abuse and students suggesting vocational counseling for elementary age children. Parents also suggested groups that deal with children who were experiencing a "rebellious" phase and programs that specifically target middle school dropouts and truants, rather than younger or older students.

  "Guidance is the weak link. There is a vacuum there, they need support, so they can tap into services, they need someone to talk to." (District Administrator)

  "We should have something, some counseling. We need something for younger kids. We've basically made our decision. We are gonna graduate." (High achiever)

  "[When you are a single mother] it is hard to take care of kids. Schools should help out, find out why kids are leaving the school grounds [to skip] instead of just telling parents. Find out why. Does he not like school? Are other kids bothering him? Then give counseling, notify parents of any changes in behavior, and explain school decisions and actions." (Parent of dropout)

Changes in School Policies

- Participants commented on the importance of changing school policies to promote success. Policy issues were related to credits for graduation, speaking Spanish in school, scheduling of classes, ESOL programs, credits for night school classes, provision of vocational programs, measurement of student achievement, school disciplinary procedures that reduce fighting, physical condition of school buildings, staff attitudes

and knowledge about Latino culture, need for additional Hispanic personnel, and tracking and counseling students who drop out. All participants recognized the barriers that exist for Latino students who are attempting to earn enough credits to graduate, suggesting that there needs to be flexibility and more options for earning credit.

"Some kids would rather go to [a different school]. You can get more credits in a year because they are not on a block schedule." (At-risk)

"It's just a few of us that have got the larger populations of ESOL students... it just doesn't seem fair that...we're all under the same umbrella, but it always seems like we need additional help and support, but we just don't seem to get it." (Principal)

BENCHMARKS AND GRADING

- Teachers and principals indicated a need to improve the current system of measuring outcomes for students. It was suggested that the tools of measurement or their implementation should be adapted for various levels of English proficiency and abilities. Principals believed that teachers need additional guidelines concerning how to grade students who are in the process of learning English. One mentioned that it can take approximately one year for students to learn the basics of English, causing teachers to become frustrated as to how to grade them fairly.

"[Teachers] feel horrible because they can't 'give' the student a grade in history or biology, and yet the student is totally frustrated, they're frustrated (the teacher), and they don't want to give the student an F, but they don't know what else to do with that student." (Principal)

"The benchmarks are too high, and that is across the board, that is all races, all socioeconomic, those benchmarks are tough and we have some kids that just don't have it cognitively. And we have to find something to do with them because they're not going to do it...and we're gonna have to get creative and help those kids...It has to start there." (Principal)

EXIT INTERVIEWS AND TRACKING

- Principals and district level personnel were concerned that exit interviews with students who are withdrawing from school have not been required by the school district (this is reportedly being re-implemented beginning in the 1999/2000 school year), and that there is a need for greater uniformity within the district in the procedures used to prevent and track dropouts. The exit interview was thought to be important because it documents why students are leaving, provides assistance with problem solving, and encourages students to continue in adult education.

Appreciation of Latino Culture and Language

- Students were concerned about being allowed to participate in activities that promote Latino culture, regardless of GPA, such as Club Arriba. They also discussed reactions to school or teacher policies that discouraged them from speaking Spanish and the value of having teachers that are Hispanic and/or understand them.

  "They think speaking Spanish is gang related." (At-risk)

  "School needs more Hispanic teachers." (High achiever)

New or Enhanced Programs

- Principals and teachers suggested a variety of new programs or services to help at-risk Latino students. These included community initiatives and classes for teachers, parents and students. Examples included off-campus seminars for teachers on Latino culture and teaching approaches, classes for young fathers with a focus on the responsibilities of parenthood and methods of coping with stress that do not involve violence, mental health services offered in the community, especially grief therapy, because of violence in the community. Other teachers and school personnel suggested English immersion labs and activities, a leadership development program and conflict resolution courses for Latino students taught by a bilingual teacher, and a mentoring program for Latino students coming from feeder middle schools. Others suggested incentive programs, such as scholarships for students who are drug free, have good grades and are not in trouble with the law.

  "Have you ever thought about having a class on how teachers can deal with those students?" (Principal)

  "Teachers need better ESOL training so they understand where students are coming from and how to help them learn English while in mainstream classes, also appreciate different cultures and be open to learning about them." (Teacher)

- Community representatives suggested that there is a need to maintain the heritage and language of the Latino culture by teaching Latino students about their own culture and teaching "Americans" about Latino culture.

  "What is happening is...we are living in a melting pot. What we need to try to do is, facing the new millennium, try to keep our heritage, our background in the American culture, we need to respect the American culture, we need to follow the American culture, but we can keep our heritage. We can keep our language, we can maybe teach the Americans our culture." (Community representative)

- Teachers recommended establishing a resource manual of available programs and services, similar to one they had seen that is maintained by the Department of Juvenile

Justice. They identified a need for a network of services that can facilitate Latino students' successful progression through the system. It was suggested that this might include such organizations as the Chamber of Commerce, HCC, and Hispanic Services Council. Similarly, a "feeder program" was suggested as a central intake and referral resource, which would have the initial task of addressing the basic needs of food and clothing. Teachers and principals commented that successful Latino professionals need to become part of the network of supports in the Latino community, by conducting outreach, serving as speakers, and mentoring students. A community representative commented that generally Latinos in the community with "higher level" status do not communicate with those at "lower levels".

"They [students] need coaching on how to get through the system. It has to be in little steps; our staff helps students get through these steps, they're like a family to the teachers, there's a vested interest. It has to be that way." (Adult education teacher)

"Everyone needs to know what everyone else is doing. We need a resource manual, with changes every year, new grants, etc., we need to keep up with this. We shouldn't have to go fishing all the time... to seek out resources when they are right next door. (Teacher)

"In some cases, some of the people that are...in good positions in the Hispanic community, they don't communicate with the...poor people." (Community representative)

- Teachers also suggested the following: (1) proactive dropout prevention beginning in middle school, (2) increased positive reinforcement, (3) limiting the number of hours students can work, (4) offering late hour school buses for after school programs, and (5) publishing the achievements of Latino community leaders in the school newspaper. Others suggested a handbook for ESOL teachers to consult concerning cultural issues and the approaches that can promote interaction between various cultural groups.

"I worked in middle school and I saw more dropouts there and more gangs." (High School Teacher)

- Several principals, administrators and community representatives agreed on the need for collaboration across schools and other community agencies serving Latino families. Suggestions included interaction between the parents and schools, and increased communication between schools and other programs serving Latino families, such as employers, churches, and social service agencies. One community representative believed that society as a whole needs to place a greater emphasis on education.

"I think too that society has gotten to the point in public education where they're wanting the school system to raise their children, as opposed to years ago, the parents raised their children but sent them to school to get an education. I think

that society has changed in their feelings for that, and I don't know why that happened." (Principal)

"Maybe if we had an opportunity, the principals, assistant principals, guidance, ESOL teachers... to sit down together to throw some of these things out on the table and then possibly come up with some other solutions, or least some programs to try, just to see what we could do." (Principal)

"It was only when churches got involved that we were able to do all this." (Teacher)

"Hispanics work in isolation, with no goals or vision in common. There needs to be collaborative identification of need and a collaborative goal to better the programs available...and wanting to make it better for others." (District administrator)

"Kids aren't going to go away. It is a responsibility and an opportunity to make a difference in the future by investing early. They are our kids." (District administrator)

IV. DATABASE ANALYSIS FINDINGS

The following narrative presents a description of the characteristics of Latino students in Hillsborough County schools, based on the analysis of data pertaining to all students identified as "Hispanic" in the school system database. The purpose of the analysis was to provide descriptive insight into the characteristics of Latino youth who withdrew, those who remained enrolled, and those who graduated between 1997 and 1999. The records of 19, 350 students were included in the database analysis for this study.

The factors extracted from the database for the purpose of analysis were categorized as either sociodemographic factors or school factors. Social and demographic factors included gender, age, language, socioeconomic status, place of birth and mobility (migrant), while school factors included school attendance, academic achievement, retention, school discipline and academic placement. Finally, the analysis included a description of Hillsborough County schools, focusing on a Latino staff and placement of Latino students.

DESCRIPTION OF SAMPLE

SCHOOLS ATTENDED

Latino students included in the sample were attending one of 79 elementary schools, 33 middle schools, 19 high schools, or 9 exceptional education schools. In addition, some students were attending one of the many "non-graded" education sites in the district, including alternative schools (non-juvenile justice), East and West Detention centers, Falkenburg Academy, group treatment facilities, Lesley Peters Halfway House, PACE, SHOP, and Youth Services.

ENROLLMENT STATUS

Table 3 reveals the number/percentage of Latino students who were enrolled or had withdrawn from grades 6, 7, or 8, as well as total numbers of students who were enrolled or had withdrawn from middle school across these grade levels. Table 2 reveals the number/ percentage of Latino students who were enrolled, had withdrawn or had graduated from grades 9, 10, 11, and 12, as well as the total numbers for high school across grade levels.

Table 3: Middle School Enrollment Status by Grade for 1997-99

Grade Level	Enrolled	Withdrew
6	2,899 (97%)	103 (3%)
7	2,837 (97%)	96 (3%)
8	2,679 (95%)	145 (5%)
Total	8,415	344

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Table 4. High School Enrollment Status by Grade for 1997-99			
Grade Level	Enrolled	Withdrew	Graduated
9	3071 (92%)	263 (8%)	--
10	2154 (93%)	173 (7%)	--
11	1554 (95%)	79 (5%)	6 (10%)
12	264 (23%)	58 (5%)	839 (72%)
Total	7043 (83%)	573 (7.5%)	845 (10%)

Withdrawal from School

Students were classified as having withdrawn from school based on either a voluntary self-withdrawal or an administrative withdrawal. Latino students who had withdrawn voluntarily cited the following reasons: voluntary withdrawal at age 16 (4%), pregnancy (2%), and to get married (<1%). Those who were classified as administrative withdrawals were withdrawn for non-attendance (40%), expulsion (8%), and death (<1%). About one-third (32%) of Latino students who withdrew were classified as "whereabouts unknown", while another thirteen percent (13%) did not enroll in school as expected.

The percentage of students who failed to enroll in school as expected was classified as dropouts for the purpose of this analysis. The percentage of Latino dropout was determined to be 7.5% among high school students and 3.9% among middle school students. This classification did not include all students who were habitually truant at the middle school level or the number of students who withdrew from school. The Hillsborough County Public Schools Secondary School Leavers Report (1997-98) estimates that Hispanic students make up over 27% of habitual truants countywide.

Social and Demographic Factors

Gender

Slightly more than one-half (52%) of Latino students were male, while forty-eight percent (48%) were female. Students who had withdrawn from school were more likely to be male (58%), while those who graduated were more likely to be female (56%). In the sixth through ninth grade, fifty four percent (54%) of Latino students were male, while by the twelfth grade 54% were female.

Age

The mean age of Latino students appeared to be on target at each grade level. For example, the mean age for sixth graders was 12 with a standard deviation of 0.76, suggesting that students in this grade were between the ages of eleven and thirteen. However, there were students at each grade level who were older (and younger) than traditional age, with the oldest sixth grader being 14 years old.

Language

Among students classified as "Hispanic" within the school system database, twenty different languages were identified as being spoken at home, however, there were only two

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primary languages identified, Spanish (55%) and English (44%). English was identified as the first language for slightly more than one-half (51%) of Latino students, while forty-eight percent (48%) spoke Spanish. The majority (93%) of Latino students identified their social language as English.

Bilingual Capacity

Students who withdrew were more likely to be non-English speakers (monolingual) (9%) or less proficient speakers of English (predominantly Spanish) (8%), than bilingual (5%). In addition, those students who were currently enrolled were more likely to be bilingual (Table 5).

Table 5. English Proficiency of Students by Enrollment Group for 1997-99

Student Type	Withdrew	Enrolled	Graduated
Monolingual Spanish	9.07%	90.54%	0.39%
Predominantly Spanish	8.37%	90.19%	1.44%
Bilingual	4.59%	92.45%	2.96%

Migrant Status

Nearly 5,000 Latino students were identified as migrant (n=4,987), including those who had moved within the state of Florida or between states during the past three years. Table 6 reveals that among students classified as migrant, nearly all (4,570 or 92%) were currently enrolled, while 330 (7%) had withdrawn, and only 87 (2%) graduated between 1997 and 1999. In addition, the overwhelming majority (96%) of migrant students were moving within the state.

Table 6. Migrant Status of Latino Students by Enrollment Group for 1997-99

Migrant Status	Enrolled	Withdrew	Graduated	Total
Interstate	4373	316	82	4771
Intrastate	196	12	5	213
Not moved in 3 years	1	2	0	3
Total	**4570**	**330**	**87**	**4978**

Meal Program Status

During the two-year period from 1997 to 1999, more than one-half (56%) of Latino students were eligible for free lunch, while thirty-eight percent (38%) were not eligible, and nearly seven percent (7%) were eligible for reduced meals. Of those Latino students who had graduated, sixty-one percent (61%) had not been eligible for free or reduced meals, compared to the forty-percent (40%) of those who had withdrawn. Conversely, more than one-half (57%) of those who had withdrawn were eligible for free meals, while less than one-third (32%) of those who had graduated were eligible. (See Figure 1)

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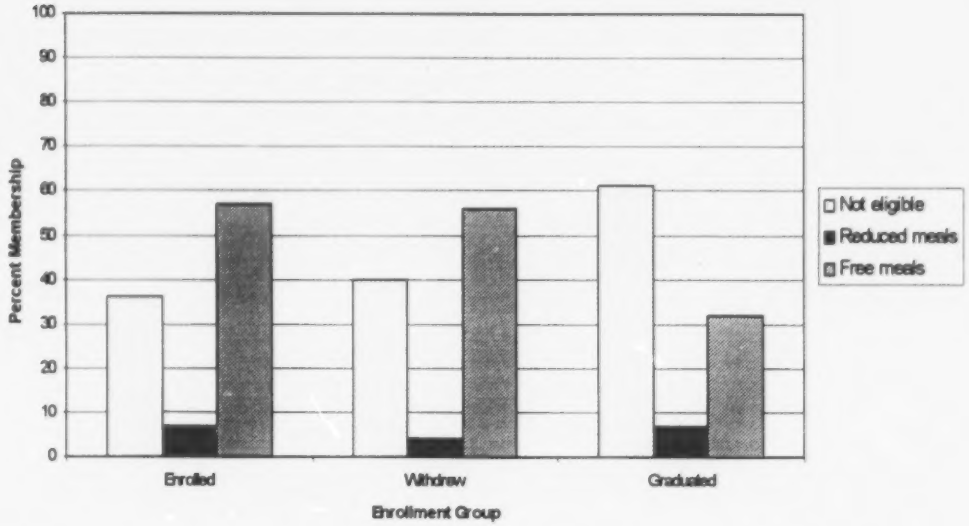
Figure 1. Percent Eligible for Free or Reduced Meals Among Enrolled, Withdrawn and Graduated Students for 1997-1998



Place of Birth

More than three-fourths (77%) of Latino students in Hillsborough County schools were born in the United States, with representation from all 50 states (Appendix C). The states reported as the birthplace for the highest numbers of Latino students were Florida, New York, New Jersey, Texas, California and Illinois, in descending order. The top five countries of birth for students born outside the U.S. included Puerto Rico, Mexico, Cuba, Colombia, and the Dominican Republic. Latino students born in Mexico, Puerto Rico and Cuba, in descending order had the highest numbers of withdrawals from school, but these were also among the most numerous sub-groups (Appendix C).

School Factors

Withdrawal

Eight percent (8%) of Latino student withdrawals from school were due to expulsion, with male students constituting the majority (87%) of those expulsions. Males were also more likely than females not to enroll in school as expected (55%). Male students represented all of the withdrawals due to death, while female students were also withdrawn for marriage or pregnancy.

Enrollment and Promotion

Most Latino students were either promoted within their school (60%) or transferred to other schools within the district (23%). The remaining students were leaving to attend a public

school in another district (13%), to attend non-public schools (1%), to be home-schooled (<1%), or to enroll in adult education (2%).

Retention

Nine percent (9%) of Latino students were retained in grade between 1997 and 1999. Table 7 reveals the specific grade promotion status of Latino students by enrollment group and overall. As might be expected, those who withdrew had the highest percentage of retentions (22%).

Table 7. Promotion and Retention of Latino Students by Enrollment Group for 1997-99

Grade Promotion Status	Withdrew	Enrolled	Graduated	Totals
Academic promotion	184 (22%)	12031 (79%)	837 (99%)	13,052 (77%)
Administrative promotion	--	58 (0.38%)	--	58 (0.34%)
Retained in grade	43 (5%)	1558 (10%)	4 (0.47%)	1605 (9%)
Z (not applicable)	1	4	--	--
Total	840	15276	843	16,959

Attendance and Tardiness

Absenteeism was highest among students who withdrew from school. The average number of unexcused days missed was 24.4 for students who withdrew 11.1 for enrolled students, and 7.9 for students who graduated. Students who withdrew from school missed an average of more than 31 days, including their excused absences.

Academic Achievement

Students who withdrew from school had lower grades overall, with their average grade across all subjects and their final exams being lower than for other enrollment categories. In middle school the difference between dropouts and enrollees was almost 0.75 grade points. At the high school level the gap widened to a full grade point.

Discipline

Discipline referrals were summed across individuals and the mean computed for each enrollment group. Table 8 presents the mean number of discipline referrals and the standard deviations for the three groups at each grade level. The average number of discipline referrals for students who withdrew was 4.9, the average number for enrollees was 3.8, and for students who graduated was 2.1. Overall, students who withdrew from school received more discipline referrals than those in other categories at every grade level.

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Table 8. Average Number of Discipline Referrals by Enrollment Group and Grade for 1997-99							
Group / Grade	**6**	**7**	**8**	**9**	**10**	**11**	**12**
Withdrew	5.1 (5.72)	7.5 (5.72)	6.1 (5.07)	5.1 (4.27)	3.7 (3.27)	3.7 (3.05)	2.8 (2.10)
Enrolled	3.8 (4.16)	4.6 (4.82)	4.2 (4.24)	4.03 (3.94)	3.0 (2.70)	2.6 (2.29)	2.5 (2.33)
Graduated	--	--	--	--	--	2.8 (2.64)	2.1 (1.71)

Suspension

Table 9 presents the mean number of days students were suspended and standard deviations by grade and group. Students who withdrew were suspended an average of 3.0 days (SD=5.85), enrollees were suspended an average of 1.4 days (SD=3.88), and graduates were suspended an average of 0.51 days (SD=1.69). The data indicate that the middle school years were the peak period for discipline referrals and suspensions and that more discipline problems were associated with students who withdrew from school.

Table 9. Average Number of Days Suspended By Enrollment Group and Grade for 1997-99							
Group / Grade	**6**	**7**	**8**	**9**	**10**	**11**	**12**
Withdrew	4.40 (8.01)	5.82 (9.10)	6.01 (8.47)	3.45 (5.81)	1.74 (3.76)	1.62 (3.86)	1.34 (2.10)
Enrolled	1.58 (4.12)	1.97 (4.91)	1.87 (4.66)	1.44 (3.79)	0.86 (2.59)	0.56 (1.95)	0.39 (1.46)
Graduated	--	--	--	--	--	1.67 (2.40)	0.49 (1.67)

Special Education

Table 10 presents the primary exceptionality for Latino students in Special Education who withdrew, as well as those who remained enrolled. Withdrawals were highest for students classified as emotionally handicapped (EH) (10.7%), severely emotionally disturbed (SED) (9.9%), and educable mentally handicapped (8.2%).

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Table 10. Special Education – Primary Exceptionality of Students by Enrollment Group for 1997-99		
Exceptional Education Category	**Withdrew**	**Enrolled**
Autistic	0.0%	100.0%
TBI	0.0%	100.0%
OHI	0.0%	100.0%
Vision	0.0%	100.0%
Trainable Mentally Handicapped	1.1%	96.8%
Language	3.5%	96.5%
Speech	2.9%	95.9%
Hospitalized/Homebound	3.9%	95.1%
Profoundly Handicapped	2.8%	94.4%
Gifted	1.5%	93.9%
Hearing	6.3%	93.8%
SLD	5.8%	92.3%
SED	9.9%	90.1%
Physically Handicapped	0.0%	90.0%
EH	10.7%	88.4%
Educable Mentally Handicapped	8.2%	87.5%
Z (not applicable)	0.0%	100.0%

Limited English Proficiency Program

Table 11 indicates the percentage of Latino students classified as Limited English Proficient (LEP) by enrollment group. Among those students who withdrew and were classified as Limited English Proficient, fewer were enrolled in classes for LEP students. These numbers indicate that LEP students who had been through the program and exited in the last two years had the lowest withdrawal rate and the highest graduation rate among LEP Students.

Table 11. Limited English Proficiency Placement of Students for Each Enrollment Group for 1997-99			
Student Type	**Withdrew**	**Enrolled**	**Graduated**
LN – LEP, but not enrolled in classes for LEP students	20.0 %	80.0 %	0.00 %
LY- Enrolled in classes for LEP students	6.67 %	91.15 %	2.19 %
LF - LEP students who exited the program within the last 2 years	3.44 %	93.33 %	3.23 %

Alternative Education

The majority (82%) of Latino students who withdrew from alternative education placements were in juvenile justice, disciplinary, or substance abuse programs. Of these, the highest percent were in substance abuse programs. Table 12 reveals the placement of these students by enrollment status.

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The reasons for the placement of middle and high school Latino students into alternative education settings can be found in Appendices C and D. The major reasons for Latino middle school students' placement included "expulsions" and being "academically unsuccessful" (Appendix D). For high school students, alternative education placement was due to being "academically unsuccessful" and "retained in grade/academically unsuccessful/attendance/ tardiness & potential dropout" (Appendix E).

Table 12. Alternative Education Program Placement by Enrollment Group for 1997-99

Placement	Withdrew	Enrolled	Graduated
Substance Abuse	33.3	66.7	0.0
Disciplinary Programs	25.5	74.5	0.0
Educational Services DJJ	24.1	75.6	0.3
Educational Services DCF	12.5	85.4	2.1
Teenage Parent	10.2	89.8	0.0
Educational Alternatives	4.9	92.1	2.9

Latino Staff and Student Distribution

Middle schools in Hillsborough County have Latino populations ranging in size from seven percent (7%) of the student body at Burnett to more than one-half (53%) of the student body at Pierce (Appendix G). The percent of Latino faculty at the middle school level, ranges from two percent (2%) at Young to eighteen percent (18%) at Roland Park.

A student-teacher ratio was computed to measure the difference between the number of Latino students and the number of Latino teaching staff in each school. A value of 1.0 indicates a 1 to 1 or equal ratio of Latino faculty and students in a specific school. The magnitude of the actual ratio illustrates any difference. Values for this ratio ranged from a nearly equal ratio of 0.87 at Walker to 10.66 at Eisenhower with a mean ratio of 3.0. These ratios are not reflective of the size of the Latino population in each school. In those schools with much larger Latino populations, a more unequal ratio might be expected. The middle schools revealed to have the smallest difference and therefore the lowest ratios between the percent of Latino students and staff were Walker, Wilson, Benito, Burns and Washington, in ascending order. The middle schools with five highest ratios were Eisenhower, Young, Van Buren, Tomlin, and Progress Village, in descending order.

Table 13 presents information about the five middle schools with the largest Latino student populations, with all middle schools being reported in Appendix G. Among these schools, those with the largest difference between number of Latino students and the number of Latino teachers (SF ratio) were Eisenhower and Webb. The only middle school with a Latino administrator among the schools with the highest Latino student populations was Pierce.

In Table 13, the specified categories of Gifted, Exceptional Student Education (ESE), Truant, and Dropout represent the percent of the total student body from each school in these categories that are Latino. Dropouts only include those students over sixteen who withdrew. As indicated in Table 12, placement of Latino students into Gifted programs was closer to being representative of the overall student population at Pierce, Oak Grove and Stewart. The placement

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of Latino students in Exceptional Student Education was proportionately higher at Webb and Stewart.

Table 13. Latino Student Enrollment, Faculty, and Administrators at Middle Schools with the Largest Latino Populations for 1997-99

School	Students %	Faculty %	Administrators %	SF Ratio[3]	Gifted %	ESE %	Truants %	Dropouts %
Pierce	52.6	17.4	33.3	3.0	43.3	41.3	1.9	0.1
Eisenhower	40.6	3.8	0.00	4.5	23.9	30.4	4.4	0.9
Oak Grove	38.4	11.5	0.00	3.3	34.8	26.3	0.9	0.3
Stewart	37.5	13.3	0.00	2.8	41.7	34.4	1.3	0.1
Webb	35.4	7.6	0.00	4.7	29.7	33.5	1.9	0.2

Table 14 presents information about the five high schools with the largest Latino student populations, with all high schools being reported in Appendix H. High schools in Hillsborough County have Latino populations ranging in size from six percent (6%) of the student body at Armwood to forty-three percent (43%) at Jefferson. The percent of Latino faculty at the high school level ranges from two percent (2%) at Brandon to fifteen percent (15%) at Jefferson. The Latino student/teacher ratio at the high school level ranged from 1.17 to 8.93, with a mean ratio of 2.79.

As indicated in Table 14, the placement of Latino students into Gifted programs was closer to being representative of the overall student population at Jefferson, while being slightly lower at Leto and very under-representative at East Bay and Hillsborough. In addition, the placement of Latino students in Exceptional Student Education was proportionately higher at Tampa Bay Tech and Hillsborough than at the other schools shown.

Table 14. Latino Student Enrollment, Faculty, and Administrators at High Schools with the Largest Latino Populations for 1997-99

School	Students %	Faculty %	Administrators %	SF Ratio	Gifted %	ESE %	Truants %	Dropouts %
Jefferson	43.0	14.6	40.0	3.0	36.8	36.3	1.8	8.9
Leto	42.1	9.5	57.1	4.5	25.3	31.7	1.2	6.8
East Bay	25.4	8.4	0.0	3.0	4.9	20.0	1.7	6.9
Hillsborough	20.9	10.3	0.0	2.0	9.0	13.7	1.0	4.4
Tampa Bay Tech	20.6	6.0	28.6	3.5	NA	17.3	0.2	1.3

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DISCUSSION

Sociodemographic data indicate those Latino students who were eligible to receive free meals at school were also more likely to drop out, suggesting that low family income may be a contributing risk factor for dropping out. Latino students who were classified as monolingual or predominantly Spanish speaking appear to be more likely to drop out than bilingual students. Considering the higher dropout numbers for these students in combination with country of birth (USA vs. other), the data suggest that students who are more recent immigrants or migrants may be in a higher risk category, although these numbers may be related to other sociodemographic factors as well. Involvement in LEP classes seems to increase the chances that limited English speaking students will graduate.

Students that are at higher risk of dropping out exhibit lack of regular school attendance, tardiness, low achievement, retention in grade, and discipline problems, especially at the middle school level. Students who were placed into Exceptional Education for emotional disturbance or were placed in Alternative Education for disciplinary, juvenile justice, or substance abuse problems were also more likely to drop out than the general Latino population.

A breakdown of the Latino student population and staff by schools (Appendix G) suggests the need to focus on dropout prevention in middle schools with low ratios of Latino administrators and teachers to students and with higher overall withdrawal rates. This points to a need for recruitment efforts for Latino teachers and administrators that provide incentives for accepting positions in lower income schools.

V. CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Participants consistently perceived the responsibility for Latino student success and dropping out to be shared by the student as an individual, by their parents, and the schools. Although much less of a focus, the community was also perceived as playing a role in student outcomes. This overarching theme reveals that participants recognize that student success or failure cannot be attributed to one or even two factors, rather that it is a complex issue. It also emphasizes the importance of using a comprehensive approach in dealing with the problem of Latino student attrition and provides insight into the potential inroads for creating a meaningful collaboration among the agencies and individuals serving the Latino community. The findings offer important insight for the community's consideration when identifying a strategic approach for the allocation of current and future resources to promote Latino student success.

Efforts to address the attrition rate of Latino students from public middle and high schools in Hillsborough County need to begin by recognizing that the causes and solutions of Latino dropout are multi-faceted. The stakeholders of this issue share responsibility for addressing the need for consistent parental and professional support, outreach and improved dissemination of information, and awareness of the cultural issues that impact on students' decision to leave school.

Greater cultural sensitivity in the academic setting includes the utilization of a variety of teaching methods to reach those who have different learning styles and may involve flexibility in designing and implementing school policy. Those serving Latino students in the schools and communities need to recognize the cultural issues that prevent these students from participating and as a result become more creative in their attempts to involve students.

The following points represent additional issues to be addressed in the effort to reverse the trend of Latino dropout from Hillsborough County schools.

Enhance Communication and Support for Students, School Personnel and Parents

Both Latino parents and students lack adequate awareness and knowledge of the programs and services available to them and generally require additional orientation to the "culture" of the school system. This includes a better understanding of current policies and procedures, the credit system, and the educational benchmarks as well as other services available in the community. Language and the lack of adequate guidance and social services and other support staff emerge as primary barriers to facilitating better communication and understanding. Clearly, there is a relationship between a family's lack of knowledge and the parents' involvement in their child's education. Lack of knowledge also fosters confusion, frustration, and lack of parental support for students, which may ultimately contribute to students' decisions to drop out.

Where possible, efforts should be made to expand school guidance and social services with an emphasis on addressing the needs and culture of Latino students and families. This may include information for parents in Spanish that explains the educational system and how they can

best support their student's success. It may also include developing an orientation for Latino students who are new to the school or the school system and their parents. This would provide a forum for the school to directly and verbally communicate with families concerning school policies, who to contact for help, being on time, grading, how to succeed, showing respect, and available programs. The school's Migrant Advocate and ESOL teacher should have some involvement in the orientation. It may be important to begin offering these orientations to students in middle or elementary school, with a plan for personal follow up by a Spanish-speaker. Community organizations, churches, recreational programs and other entities could also contribute to better understanding of services available in the community and the need for parents to be involved and informed about the school system. This may occur through parent support groups, community gatherings, tutoring and mentoring programs, sports and other activities already occurring in the community.

Communication between the schools and parents also needs to be improved at the school level and supported by programs and policies at the district level. Spanish speaking parents need for the school to communicate directly with them, rather than through the student, and this requires availability of Spanish speaking staff that is familiar with the specific Latino groups at their school. Parents need to be kept in the loop when decisions are being made concerning their children, yet it is often difficult to reach them by phone when needed. Solutions to this dilemma may be generated through a process of collaboration with parents and school staff. In general, communication needs to be respectful and to recognize that a parent's lack of English language skills does not reflect on their intelligence. The schools' approach should be one of welcoming parents and should validate their position as the parent.

One of the most effective resources for the schools according to participants is the Migrant Advocate. This person has regular contact with migrant families through both telephone and phone contact. It may be helpful to consider expanding this position to non-migrant Latino students and to recruit and retain additional support and teaching staff who are bilingual/ bicultural in order to avoid placing overwhelming responsibilities on the shoulders of one person.

Increase Participation in and Availability of Activities

Once students and parents are aware of the available services, they are likely to need assistance accessing them. This includes a need to offer flexible hours for conferences, meetings, and other services to accommodate parents' work schedules. Schools and other agencies providing programs also need to collaborate with the school bus system and public transportation to ensure that families can attend both day and evening meetings. An alternative would be to hold meetings in the families' neighborhood and/or offer home visits.

Outreach is also needed to involve students in clubs, organizations, sports, and other activities. A strategic effort needs to be made to recruit and encourage the involvement of Latino students in clubs, music groups, sports, ROTC, HOSA, Spanish honor society, FBLA, and other organizations. It may also be helpful to recruit Latino sponsors and mentors from the community, who can provide input in meetings. By increasing the involvement of Latinos in these activities and programs, they are likely to be more appealing to students and appear less "white." As important would be to make an effort to attract Latino students from various backgrounds and all levels of academic success. Efforts also need to be made to involve Latino

students in leadership roles without alienating them from their Latino peer group. Again, it may be important to offer flexible scheduling, locate a variety of programs in neighborhoods with high concentrations of Latino families and provide transportation.

Promote Appreciation for Latino Culture

There is a clear need for additional Latino and bilingual teachers and staff in most schools. This is an issue that needs to be addressed by every sector of the community rather than placing the burden of recruitment and retention solely on the schools. At-risk students in this study specifically seemed to be able to develop a greater rapport with Latino educators and other authority figures. It may also be helpful for teachers who do not speak Spanish to be encouraged and supported in learning Spanish and increasing recognition and appreciation of Latino culture in the schools and in the community. Specific to schools, teachers and other personnel need to ensure that their discussions colleagues regarding Latino students could not be construed as "gossiping" and that they are not unfairly labeling students as "bad kids."

In support of their students as well as their teachers and staff, schools need to increase their efforts to reduce perceived discrimination and the community as a whole needs to consider ways to promote more positive images of Latino youths. This may mean up-to-date information for schools and community agencies on factors related to gang involvement, drug abuse, illegal activities related to drugs and/or gang involvement and current effective methods for reducing such activities that are appropriate for Latinopopulations. Promoting positive images may also include publicizingaccomplishments of Latino students more widely through all forms of media and willingness of community leaders and public figures who are of Latin backgrounds to speak up about their heritage and experiences. In addition, schools and communities need to address the issue of bilingualism through policies and practices that allow for the use of Spanish without encouraging destructive use of the language (i.e., swearing and talking behind the backs of monolingual students and teachers in school). Based on the perspective of some students and parents, it is recommended that schools and the community examine biases that might exist when assigning blame to Latino students as individuals or a group, and address how they can avoid giving students negative impressions of their intellectual abilities.

According to focus group participants, one strategy that would support Latino students well is for teachers to utilize a variety of teaching styles and to provide a greater depth of explanation of assignments. Although clearly difficult in light of the average class size in most public schools, teachers need to find more opportunities to offer Latino students individualized attention. This may need to be supplemented through funding and resources sought by and provided through collaboration with other community agencies and volunteers. In addition, for Latino students it seems to be particularly important to have lessons that rely more heavily on class activities and group discussions, rather than lectures and worksheets, although this may vary according to individual preference. These types of activities may also be provided through supplemental funding and extra-curricular or after school programs. Specific recommendations given for teachers include covering subjects more slowly, with math teachers providing more comprehensive explanations and working to ensure that students feel comfortable enough to ask questions when necessary. Latino students described their positive response to opportunities to help one another, work in groups, and speak Spanish; therefore this may be another area to explore in curriculum planning. The current process of assessing the need for ESOL should be

examined in response to some of the concerns voiced by focus group participants. Possible revisions may be to assure appropriate placement more rapidly, to only include students who clearly need assistance with languauge and culture, and to bridge the gap between ESOL classes and mainstream classes more developmentally.

Collaborate to Enhance Community Supports and Adapt School Policies to Community Strengths and Needs

Based on suggestions from all types of study participants, it is recommended that the school district consider the need for smaller class sizes, vocational schools, and vocational programs within existing schools. The district may also want to consider making study skills and school "survival skills" (class in American school culture) part of the curriculum for Latino students or to collaborate with community based organizations to increase the knowledge of parents about the school system. To increase teachers' ability to foster success in Latino students, the schools may want to sponsor or contribute to the development of a community-wide reference booklet that details the programs and services available for Latinos and for all students. In addition, schools and the community as a whole should explore developing incentive/award programs for students and parents.

Based on the cultural and familial influences that impact student attendance and tardiness, schools may need to examine their application of these policies. Other policy considerations include flexible credit requirements, school hours/length of school day, concentrating resources in poorer schools, how to address cultural competency for all school staff, how to create more welcoming environments in schools for parents (i.e., visible and understandable signs, plenty of parking space, trained and bilingual staff available in the front office), and organizing and supporting a county wide committee to promote Latino parent involvement in school system policy and program development.

VI. ACTION PLAN

FINDINGS FROM THE DISCUSSION GROUPS

The data gathered from the discussion groups showed a high degree of congruency with the findings from this study. The four major factors contributing to Latino student achievement based on this study were presented to the participants: (1) student motivation, (2) having supportive parents, (3) having supportive teachers, and (4) student involvement in extracurricular activities. The participants were asked to comment on these factors, to identify additional factors, and to rank them in relation to importance and to the degree they had any influence on them. The group participants identified five additional factors that in their view also contribute to student success: (1) having a supportive school administration, (2) letting students know that their families, their schools, and their community expect them to finish school and continue their educational career, (3) the presence of a supportive community, (4) having the schools and the community outreach to families, and (5) having community programs to help meet the needs of students and their families.

The three top rankings from the discussion groups are consistent with the three top rankings from this study providing an informal validation to the study findings. There was disagreement between the two data sets regarding the fourth contributor to Latino student success identified in the study in that this factor ranked in eighth place in the discussion groups. It is worth noting that the five additional factors identified by the participants in the discussion groups are not all that different from the additional factors identified through the study. Those were: (1) staying out of trouble, (2) having practical skills and awareness of existing supports, (3) having interesting and motivating activities, and (4) school influences. Table 15 presents the summary of rankings obtained from the group discussions in order or importance and Table 16 summarizes the rankings in relation to influence.

Note: The meaning of community that emerged from the discussion groups is one that encompasses all the different stakeholders present in any given community. The participants talked about the private sector (i.e., businesses, industries, and organizations), the public sector (i.e., libraries, parks, law enforcement, and schools), the faith community, and individual community members interested in supporting education.

Table 15: Summary of Rankings in Relation to Importance

Factors	Ranking
Student Motivation	1
Supportive Parents	2
Supportive Teachers	3
Supportive Administration	4
Expectations	5
Supportive Community	6
Outreach	7
Student Involvement in Activities	8
Programs	9

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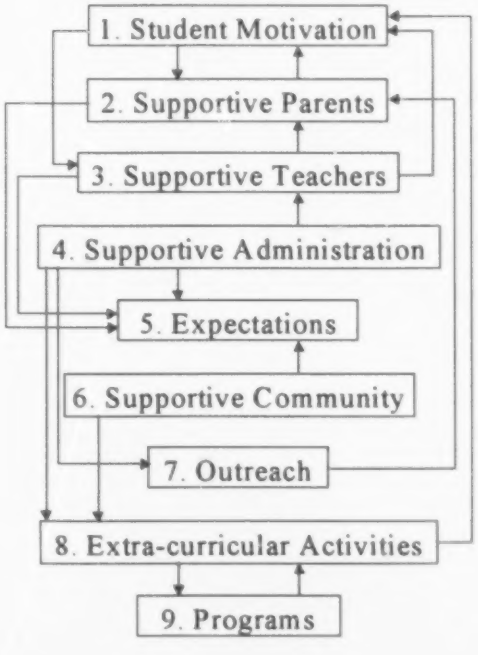
Table 16: Summary of Rankings in Relation to Importance			
Factors	**Parents**	**Community Leaders**	**School Representatives**
Student Motivation	2	3	3
Supportive Parents	1	1	6
Supportive Teachers	3	7	1
Supportive Administration	5	9	2
Expectations	8	5	4
Supportive Community	7	6	9
Outreach	9	2	8
Student Involvement	4	4	7
Programs	6	8	5

DESIGNING THE PLAN

This action plan combines the findings from this study, the findings from the discussion groups, the suggestions offered by the participants in the study, and the recommendations offered by the data collection team. Considering the interconnectedness among the different contributors to the success of Latino students (see Figure 2) the action plan was organized based on the most significant themes that emerged from this study, rather than by factor. Following this approach prevents a process that is highly interconnected and interdependent from becoming fragmented. The plan is presented in a summary form in which the suggested actions, the person/agency responsible for the action, and the factors impacted by the actions are simultaneously displayed.

Figure 2. Contributing Factors to Latino Student Success and their Interrelationships



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1. Enhance Communication and Support for Students, School Personnel and Parents

1.1 Finding: Both Latino parents and students lack adequate awareness and knowledge of programs and services available to them.

Goal: Understanding of public school systems will lead to successful school completion.

Expected Outcome: Increased knowledge of Latino parents and students about the school systems.

Suggested Actions	Person/Agency Responsible	Factor(s) Impacted
▪ Provide bilingual supportive services (i.e., counseling, case management, etc.) to address the difficulties of students and families	School social workers, psychologists, teachers, community mental health agencies	Student motivation, supportive parents, programs
▪ Increase accessibility and availability to programs for students at risk of dropping out (i.e., curricular and extracurricular activities and family support)	School system/administrators, teachers, community	Student motivation, supportive parents, supportive teachers, supportive community
▪ Create a process to involve parents in the school's guidance process	Guidance counselors, parents, bilingual contact	Student motivation, supportive parents, supportive administration

1.2 Finding: There is a need for adequate guidance and social services provided in Spanish creating barriers to communication, adjustment, and understanding between the schools and students and their parents.

Expected Outcome: Increase accessibility of Latino students and their parents to schools and to school-based programs.

Suggested Actions	Person/Agency Responsible	Factor(s) Impacted
Provide bilingual supportive services (i.e., counseling, case management, etc.) to address the difficulties of students and families	School social workers, psychologists, teachers, community mental health agencies	Student motivation, supportive parents, programs
Increase accessibility and availability to programs for students at risk of dropping out (i.e., curricular and extracurricular activities and family support)	School system / administrators, teachers, community	Student motivation, supportive parents, supportive teachers, supportive community
Create a process to involve parents in the school's guidance process	Guidance counselors, parents, bilingual contact	Student motivation, supportive parents, supportive administration

1.1 Finding: Communication between schools and parents needs improvement at the school level and must be supported by programs and policies at the district level.

Expected Outcome: Latino families will feel welcomed at schools, supported by the community, and validated as parents.

Suggested Actions	Person/Agency Responsible	Factor(s) Impacted
▪ Assess the effectiveness of current methods of communication between schools and parents	School system / administrators, parents	Student motivation, supportive parents, expectations, supportive administration
▪ Design a communication plan that encourage Spanish speaking staff in schools to implement a communication collaboration process with Latino families (i.e., Migrant Advocate)	School system / administrators, parents, community advocates	Student motivation, supportive parents, expectations, supportive administration, supportive community
▪ Organize and support a county wide committee to promote Latino parent involvement and student success	School system / administrators, parents, community	Student motivation, supportive parents, expectations, supportive administration, supportive community
▪ Develop a process to encourage parental participation in the school community	School system / administrators, parents, community	Student motivation, supportive parents, expectations, supportive administration

2. *Increase Participation in and Availability of Activities*

2.1 Finding: Students and parents need assistance in accessing school services.

Goal: Latino student integration will contribute to academic success.

Expected Outcome: Effective strategies will increase the accessibility of students and families to school services.

Suggested Actions	Person/Agency Responsible	Factor(s) Impacted
▪ Offer flexible schedules for school conferences, meetings, and other services to accommodate parents' work schedule	School system / administrators, teachers	Student motivation, supportive parents, expectations, supportive teachers, supportive administration
▪ Arrange transportation for parents who have difficulty attending meetings due to lack of transportation	School system / administrators, teachers, community	Supportive parents, expectations, supportive administration, supportive community
▪ Hold meetings in the families' neighborhood and/or offer home visits	School system / administrators, teachers, community	Student motivation, supportive parents, supportive teachers, supportive administration, supportive community

2.2. FINDING: LATINO STUDENTS' ACCESS TO ACADEMIC SUPPORTS, SPORTS, CLUBS AND ORGANIZATIONS NEED TO BE EXPANDED.

Expected Outcome: Increased participation of Latino students in curricular and extracurricular activities geared at improving their academic success.

Suggested Actions	Person/Agency Responsible	Factor(s) Impacted
▪ Develop outreach strategies to increase Latino participation in activities	School system/administrators, teachers, community	Student motivation, expectations, supportive teachers, supportive administration, supportive communities, outreach, programs
▪ Recruit Latino sponsors and mentors to participate in activities and programs	School system/administrators, teachers, parents, community	Student motivation, supportive parents, expectations, supportive teachers, supportive administration, supportive community, outreach, programs
▪ Develop and disseminate a linguistically appropriate resource manual of school system programs and services	School system / administrators, teachers	Student motivation, supportive parents, expectations, supportive teachers, supportive administration, outreach, programs
▪ Develop and disseminate a list of community organizations and agencies that serve Latinos	School system / administrators, community, parents	Student motivation, supportive parents, expectations, supportive teachers, supportive administration, supportive community, outreach, programs
▪ Encourage community volunteering as part of the school requirements/activities	School system / administrators, teachers, community	Student motivation, expectations, supportive teachers, supportive administration, supportive community, programs
▪ Provide culturally appropriate vocational and career testing and guidance	Guidance counselors, occupational specialists, after school programs	Student motivation, supportive parents, supportive administration
▪ Provide bilingual assistance in filling out college admissions and financial aid forms to students and parents	Guidance counselors	Student motivation, supportive parents, supportive administration

3. Promote Appreciation for Latino Culture

3. 1 Finding: There is a need for additional Latino and bilingual teachers and staff in schools.

Goal: Culturally sensitive schools, effective role models and an appreciation for cultural diversity will contribute to Latino academic success.

Expected Outcome: An increased cultural sensitivity will be reflected through school policies, procedures, and recruitment

Suggested Actions	Person/Agency Responsible	Factor(s) Impacted
▪ Recruit more Latino and bilingual teachers and staff	School system / administrators, community	Student motivation, supportive parents, expectations, supportive administration, supportive community
▪ Provide opportunities for teachers interested in learning Spanish and increasing their awareness of Latino cultures	School system / administrators, teachers, community	Student motivation, supportive parents, expectations, supportive teachers, supportive community
▪ Celebrate diversity and highlight the achievements of the Latino community to promote positive images of Latino youth	School system / administrators, teachers, community	Student motivation, supportive parents, supportive teachers, supportive administration, supportive community
▪ Establish practices and policies that emphasize positive use of other languages (i.e., inclusion, respect)	Teachers, parents, community	Student motivation, supportive parents, supportive teachers, supportive community
▪ Utilize a variety of teaching styles to increase students' understanding and comprehension	Teachers, community, parents	Student motivation, supportive parents, supportive teachers, supportive community

4. Collaborate to Enhance Communication and Understanding of School Policies

4.1 Finding: **The appropriate communication, understanding and/or application of school policies may need to be examined based on the socio-economic, cultural, and familial circumstances faced by some students.**

Goal: A supportive environment with flexibility to assist underserved families will contribute to Latino academic success.

Expected Outcome: Increased understanding and appropriate articulation and application of policies will increase resiliency and success of families and students.

Suggested Actions	Person/Agency Responsible	Factor(s) Impacted
▪ Address the need of some students to help meet the economic/social needs of their families such as offering flexible credit requirements and school hours	School system / administrators, teachers, social services staff, community	Student motivation, supportive parents, expectations, supportive teachers, supportive administration
▪ Reduce class sizes and enhance vocational programs within the school system	School system / administrators, community	Student motivation, supportive parents, supportive teachers, expectations, supportive administration, supportive community
▪ Review adequacy of resources in schools with large population of students and families with greater social and economic needs. Address inadequacies	School system / administrators, community	Student motivation, supportive parents, supportive teachers, expectations, supportive administration, supportive community
▪ Offer cultural competency training for all school staff on an ongoing basis	School system / administration	Student motivation, supportive parents, supportive teachers, expectations, supportive administration
▪ Develop an elective about cultural awareness available to all students focusing on understanding cultural diversity	School system / administration	Student motivation, supportive teachers/administration, expectations

ENDNOTES

[1] "Latino and "Hispanic" will be used interchangeably throughout this report.

[2] "Latino and "Hispanic" will be used interchangeably throughout this report.

[3] SF ratio summarizes the student–faculty relationship for the school. A SF ratio of 3 would indicate that Latino students are represented in the student body (45% Latino) at 3 times the Latino representation at the faculty level (15% Latino). A value of 1.0 would indicate that Latino students and faculty represent the same percentage as their respective groups.

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APPENDIX A:

DEMOGRAPHIC PROFILE OF STUDENT FOCUS GROUP PARTICIPANTS

Descriptive demographic information is presented here for the at-risk and high achieving students only. Demographic information for parents, teachers, and dropouts were not available and therefore not included in this report.

The following table represents the demographic information for both at-risk and high achieving student participants. Please refer to Appendix J for a copy of the survey.

STUDENT DEMOGRAPHICS

Student Type	Gender	Age Groups	Primary Language	Parents in Home
At-risk students (n=47)	Females = 53% Males = 47%	16 to 19 yrs = 57% 12 to 15 yrs = 43%	English = 45% Spanish = 25% Both = 30%	Single = 9% Two = 70%
High achieving students ***(n=54)***	Females = 61% Males = 39%	16 to 19 yrs = 55% 12 to 15 yrs = 45%	English = 42% Spanish = 22% Both = 35%	Single = 13% Two = 86%

- A total of 47 at-risk and 54 high achieving students participated in the student focus groups and interviews. In both groups, the percentage of female participants was higher, with the ratio of females (61%) to males (39%) being nearly double among high achieving students. Students range in age from 12 to 15 years, with those ages 16 to 19 being slightly more frequently represented. Nearly one-half of these students identified their primarily language as English, while approximately one third speak primarily Spanish, and one-third speak both languages equally well. The majority of at-risk (70%) and high achieving (86%) participants reported living in two parent households.

Student Type	Child Residency	Parent Residency	Years Living in U.S.	Years Living in Hillsborough County
At-risk students (n=47)	Born in U.S. = 57% Born outside of U.S. = 43%	Outside U.S. = 43% Both parent and child born in U.S.= 19% Unknown = 38%	Mean = 11.8 yrs Range = .5 to 18 yrs Mode = 16 yrs	Mean = 9.1 yrs Range = .5 to 17 yrs Mode = 7 and 14 yrs
High achieving students ***(n=54)***	Born in U.S. = 59% Born outside of U.S. = 41%	Outside of U.S. = 50% Both parent and child born in U.S. = <1% Unknown = 49%	Mean = 12.2 yrs Range = 1to 18 yrs Mode = 17 yrs	Mean = 10.8 yrs Range = 1 to 18 yrs Mode = 16 yrs

- Slightly more students reported being born in the United States (U.S.), than in some other country, with the ratio being very similar for both those at-risk and high achievers. One-half (50%) of high achievers and forty-three percent (43%) of those at-risk reported their parents were born outside of the U.S. Less than one percent (1%) of

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high achievers reported that both they and their parents were born in the U.S., versus nineteen percent (19%) of at-risk students.

- Participating students reportedly have been living in the U.S. for an average of 12 years and in Hillsborough County for an average of between nine and 11 years.

Of those students born outside of the United States, the following chart represents the percentage of participants from each country of origin, by first and second generation, as well as type of student (at-risk or high achieving).

Country of Origin

Country of Origin	# of 1st Generation At-Risk Students (n=20)	# of 1st Generation High Achieving Students (n=22)	# of 2nd Generation At-risk Students (n=20)	# of 2nd Generation High Achieving Students (n=27)
Mexico	11	14	11	15
Puerto Rico	6	6	4	11
Colombia	1	--	1	--
Belgium	1	--	--	--
Nicaragua	1	--	--	--
Cuba	--	--	1	5
Dominican Republic	--	--	1	--
Chile	--	1	--	--
Peru	--	1	--	--
Guatemala	--	--	--	1
Spain	--	--	--	1

- Of those students born outside of the U.S., most of the at-risk and high achieving students identified Mexico as their country of origin, followed by Puerto Rico. Fewer students were born in Colombia, Belgium, Nicaragua, Cuba, the Dominican Republic, Chile, Peru, Guatemala, and Spain. There appear to be few differences in country of origin among at-risk students and high achievers, although more second-generation high achieving students had parents born in Puerto Rico and Cuba than any other country.

Household Demographics

The following tables illustrate the number of people living in the household by student type and parents' country of origin.

Number Living in Household		
	High achievers	Low achievers
Mean	5.2	5.3
Range	2 to 9 members	2 to 11 members

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- Participants reported that an average of five people were currently living in their households, with the number ranging from as low as two to as high as 11. There was very little difference in the number living in the household between high and low achieving students.

Number in Household by Parents' Country of Origin								
	Mexico		Puerto Rico		United States		Cuba	
	*High	*Low	*High	*Low	*High	*Low	*High	*Low
Mean	6.1	5.5	3.8	4.7	4.2	5.6	3.6	3.0
Mode	5.0	5.0	3.5	5.5	4.0	5.0	4.0	3.0
Range	3 to 9	3 to 8	3 to 5	2 to 8	3 to 6	2 to 11	1 to 4	3 only

*denotes high or low achievers

- There were few differences in the mean number of people in the students' households by their parents' country of origin. For instance, low achievers whose parents were born in Puerto Rico and the United States reported having approximately one more person in their households than high achievers.

Parent Occupations

Table 14 – Labor and Industry Positions	
Labor and Industry Positions Held by Parents of At-Risk Students	**Labor and Industry Positions Held by Parents of High Achieving Students**
• manufacturing • construction worker • carpentry • custodian • plant nursery employee • factory work • landscaping • grocery • trucking • tree farming (and other farm workers) • maintenance • house painting • air conditioning repair • waitress • cable repair service • vehicle inspection	• manufacturing • construction worker • carpentry • custodian • plant nursery employee • warehouse/factory worker • irrigation and landscaping • grocery • trucking • agriculture and farm work • fishery • repairman • child daycare • dishwashing • mechanic • meat packing • sanitation services

- Participating at-risk and high achieving students were asked to identify their parents' occupations. Both identified a variety of both skilled and unskilled labor, as well as professional positions. Those with parents working as skilled and unskilled laborers reportedly held similar types of jobs, as revealed in Table 14. These included occupa-

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tions involving precision production, craft and repair; operators, fabricators, as well as those in the farming industry and other labor.

Table 15 – Professional Positions	
Professional Positions Held by Parents of At-Risk Students	**Professional Positions Held by Parents of High Achieving Students**
• supervisor • customer service representative • career resource professional • receptionist • retail salesperson • bank teller • medical assistant • telemarketer • retired • disabled	• environmental engineer • environmental health manager • accountant • teacher • teacher's aide • manager • commercial artist • loan administrator • medical professional (nurse, physician, nurses assistant) • electrician • insurance agent • apartment manager • bank guard • secretary • hospitality

Table 15 reveals the professional positions parents held by type of student and seems to indicate that the parents of high achieving students were more likely to be holding a variety of positions in this category. Specifically, they were more likely to be employed in managerial and professional positions than parents of at-risk students. In addition, the positions they held were more likely to require a higher level of education. A few at-risk students reported that their parents were retired or disabled.

Student Involvement in Activities

- Students were asked to indicate the programs they were involved in both in and outside of school. They identified a variety of activities and programs, some of which both at-risk and high achieving students have in common. Four categories of activities and programs were derived for both types of student participants, with an additional five categories being identified for high achievers. The at-risk categories included: (1) electives, (2) special classes, (3) career-related classes and clubs, and (4) interest clubs. High achievers were also represented in five additional categories: (5) service clubs, (6) honor clubs, (7) sports, (8) student government, and (9) advanced classes. Table 16 below provides examples of the specific activities and programs by student type and category. In addition to these categories, some students have after school jobs or are attending night school.

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Table 16 – Latino Student Involvement in Programs/Activities		
Program/ Activity Categories	**At-Risk Students**	**High Achievers**
1. Electives	▪ Orchestra/band ▪ Teaching assistant ▪ Leadership program	▪ Dance/music group ▪ Leadership program ▪ Computer class
2. Special Classes	▪ General Education Diploma (GED) Intensive Learning Alternative Program (ILAP) ▪ English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) ▪ Impact ▪ Specific Learning Disabilities (SLD)	▪ Migrant program ▪ ESOL ▪ ILAP
3. Career-Related Classes & Clubs	▪ ROTC ▪ DCT ▪ Health Occupation Students of America (HOSA) ▪ Work experience program	▪ DECA ▪ Future Business Leaders of America (FBLA) ▪ HOSA
4. Interest Clubs	▪ Board game club ▪ Students Against Drunk Driving (SADD) ▪ Photography club ▪ Latin Quarters ▪ Club Arriba	▪ History club ▪ Youth crime watch ▪ SWAT ▪ SADD ▪ International Club ▪ Impacto ▪ Interact Club ▪ Latin Quarters ▪ Club Arriba
5. Service Clubs		▪ Key Club ▪ Exchange ▪ Service Club ▪ Mentoring
6. Honor Clubs		▪ National Honor Society ▪ Spanish Honor Society
7. Sports		▪ Cheerleading ▪ Football ▪ Basketball ▪ Soccer ▪ Track
8. Student Government		▪ Student government ▪ Student organizations
9. Advanced Classes		▪ Honors ▪ Advanced placement classes

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APPENDIX B:

HILLSBOROUGH COUNTY SCHOOL DISTRICT WITHDRAWAL CODES

Secondary WithdrawalCodes
1997-98School District of Hillsborough County, Florida

DNE: Any PK-12 student who was expected to attend school but did not enter as expected for unknown reasons.

W01: Any PK-12 student promoted, retained, or transferred to another attendance reporting unit in the same school.

W02: Any PK-12 student promoted, retained, or transferred to another school in the same district.

W03: Any PK-12 student who withdraws to attend another public school in- or out-of-state.

W04: Any PK-12 student who withdraws to attend a nonpublic school in- or out-of-state.

W05: Any student over compulsory attendance age who leaves school voluntarily with no intention of returning.

W06: Any student who graduated from school with a standard diploma.

W07: Any student who graduated from school with a special diploma.

W08: Any student who left school with a certificate of completion.

W09: Any student who left school with a special certificate of completion.

W10: Any PK-12 student in a dropout prevention program who graduated from school with a diploma based on successful completion of the GED test.

W11: Any PK-12 student withdrawn from school due to hardship.

W12: Any PK-12 student withdrawn from school due to death.

W13: Any PK-12 student withdrawn from school due to court action.

W14: Any student who withdraws to enter the military.

W15: Any PK-12 student who is withdrawn from school due to nonattendance.

W16: Any student who withdraws from school to get married.

W17: Any student who withdraws from school due to pregnancy.

W18: Any student who withdraws from school due to medical reasons.

W19: Any student who is withdrawn from school because exceptional student education programs are unavailable due to the student's age.

W20: Any student who withdraws from school due to failing the high school competency test (HSCT), and who does not receive any of the certificates of completion.

W21: Any student who is withdrawn from the rolls due to being expelled from school.

W22: Any PK-12 student whose whereabouts is unknown.

W23: Any PK-12 student who withdraws from school for any reason other than W01-W22, or W24-W26.

W24: Any PK-12 student who withdraws from school to attend a home education program.

W25: Any student who withdraws from school who is under compulsory attendance age. (This may not be used for students six or above.)

W26: Any student who leaves to enter the adult program within the district prior to completion of graduation requirements.

W27: Any student graduated from school with a special diploma which is awarded based on certifying mastery of demonstrated employment and community competencies.

APPENDIX C:

PLACE OF BIRTH
FOR HILLSBOROUGH COUNTY HISPANIC STUDENTS

	Withdrew		Enrolled		Graduated		Total	
Place of Birth	Number	%	Number	%	Number	%	Number	%
Alaska	0	0.0	14	100.0	0	0.0	14	0.1
Alabama	1	4.3	22	95.7	0	0.0	23	0.1
Arkansas	1	10.0	9	90.0	0	0.0	10	0.1
Arizona	0	0.0	19	95.0	1	5.0	20	0.1
California	22	4.5	459	93.3	11	2.2	492	2.7
Colorado	4	4.5	83	94.3	1	1.1	88	0.5
Connecticut	6	2.7	213	94.2	7	3.1	226	1.2
DC	0	0.0	24	96.0	1	4.0	25	0.1
Delaware	1	8.3	9	75.0	2	16.7	12	0.1
Florida	219	3.7	5413	91.8	267	4.5	5899	32.1
Georgia	2	2.2	84	93.3	4	4.4	90	0.5
Hawaii	0	0.0	24	85.7	4	14.3	28	0.2
Iowa	0	0.0	5	100.0	0	0.0	5	0.0
Idaho	0	0.0	9	100.0	0	0.0	9	0.0
Illinois	23	4.9	415	88.7	30	6.4	468	2.5
Indiana	5	12.2	34	82.9	2	4.9	41	0.2
Kansas	0	0.0	9	90.0	1	10.0	10	0.1
Kentucky	0	0.0	18	100.0	0	0.0	18	0.1
Louisiana	3	5.1	52	88.1	4	6.8	59	0.3
Massachusetts	15	5.0	280	93.6	4	1.3	299	1.6
Maryland	0	0.0	23	100.0	0	0.0	23	0.1
Maine	1	7.1	13	92.9	0	0.0	14	0.1
Michigan	10	7.2	126	91.3	2	1.4	138	0.8
Minnesota	0	0.0	4	80.0	1	20.0	5	0.0

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(Appendix C continued)

	Withdrew		Enrolled		Graduated		Total	
Place of Birth	Number	%	Number	%	Number	%	Number	%
Missouri	0	0.0	11	100.0	0	0.0	11	0.1
Mississippi	1	4.8	19	90.5	1	4.8	21	0.1
Montana	0	0.0	2	66.7	1	33.3	3	0.0
North Carolina	5	5.7	73	83.9	9	10.3	87	0.5
North Dakota	0	0.0	7	100.0	0	0.0	7	0.0
Nebraska	0	0.0	3	75.0	1	25.0	4	0.0
New Hampshire	0	0.0	7	100.0	0	0.0	7	0.0
New Jersey	48	5.6	775	89.8	40	4.6	863	4.7
New Mexico	2	7.1	25	89.3	1	3.6	28	0.2
Nevada	0	0.0	17	100.0	0	0.0	17	0.1
New York	104	4.3	2216	90.9	117	4.8	2437	13.3
Ohio	7	4.3	144	89.4	10	6.2	161	0.9
Oklahoma	3	8.8	30	88.2	1	2.9	34	0.2
Oregon	0	0.0	9	100.0	0	0.0	9	0.0
Pennsylvania	19	7.3	233	89.6	8	3.1	260	1.4
Rhode Island	1	3.0	31	93.9	1	3.0	33	0.2
South Carolina	0	0.0	31	93.9	2	6.1	33	0.2
South Dakota	1	12.5	7	87.5	0	0.0	8	0.0
Tennessee	0	0.0	19	95.0	1	5.0	20	0.1
Texas	50	6.2	719	89.4	35	4.4	804	4.4
Utah	0	0.0	3	75.0	1	25.0	4	0.0
Virginia	5	7.9	53	84.1	5	7.9	63	0.3
Vermont	0	0.0	1	100.0	0	0.0	1	0.0
Washington	2	6.5	29	93.5	0	0.0	31	0.2
Wisconsin	0	0.0	45	95.7	2	4.3	47	0.3
Wyoming	0	0.0	10	100.0	0	0.0	10	0.1
US Total	561	4.3	11880	91.3	578	4.4	13019	70.9

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(Appendix C continued)

	Withdrew		Enrolled		Graduated		Total	
Place of Birth	Number	%	Number	%	Number	%	Number	%
Puerto Rico1	135	5.8	2115	91.0	73	3.1	2323	12.6
Mexico	88	7.4	1099	91.9	9	0.8	1196	6.5
Cuba	23	3.7	569	91.5	30	4.8	622	3.4
Argentina	3	33.3	5	55.6	1	11.1	9	0.0
Bolivia	0	0.0	7	77.8	2	22.2	9	0.0
Brazil	1	2.8	33	91.7	2	5.6	36	0.2
Chile	0	0.0	12	92.3	1	7.7	13	0.1
Colombia	6	2.4	232	93.5	10	4.0	248	1.3
Costa Rica	0	0.0	24	100.0	0	0.0	24	0.1
Dominican Republic	7	3.2	206	93.6	7	3.2	220	1.2
Equador	4	6.7	54	90.0	2	3.3	60	0.3
El Salvador	1	2.6	35	92.1	2	5.3	38	0.2
Guatemala	2	4.1	45	91.8	2	4.1	49	0.3
Honduras	3	3.3	87	94.6	2	2.2	92	0.5
Nicaragua	2	3.7	46	85.2	6	11.1	54	0.3
Peru	3	2.3	116	89.2	11	8.5	130	0.7
Panama	5	5.2	85	87.6	7	7.2	97	0.5
Uruguay	0	0.0	2	100.0	0	0.0	2	0.0
Venezuela	2	1.5	118	90.8	10	7.7	130	0.7
SA Total	285	5.3	4890	91.4	177	3.3	5352	29.1
Grand Total	846	4.6	16770	91.3	755	4.1	18371	

1. Puerto Rico is included with the South American countries for illustrative purposes only.

APPENDIX D:

Reasons for Placement into Alternative Education for Middle School Students Who Dropped Out

	Grade 6		Grade 7		Grade 8	
Reason for placement	Number	Percent	Number	Percent	Number	Percent
Academically unsuccessful	3	6.4	21	19.1	25	19.4
Academically unsuccessful & Potential dropout	2	4.3	1	0.9	1	0.8
Academically unsuccessful & Retained in grade			3	2.7	3	2.3
Academically unsuccessful & Attendance/tardiness			1	0.9	1	0.8
Attendance/tardiness					1	0.8
Disciplinary referrals	1	2.1	1	0.9	1	0.8
Expulsions	28	59.6	41		38	29.5
Potential dropout			2	1.8	2	1.6
Retained in grade			2	1.8	1	0.8
Retained in grade, Academically unsuccessful, & Attendance/tardiness					1	0.8
Retained in grade, Academically unsuccessful, Attendance/tardiness, & Potential dropout					2	1.6
Student substance abuse					1	0.8
Suspensions			2	1.8	1	0.8
Suspensions & Disciplinary referrals	4	8.5			4	3.1
Teenage parent	1	2.1			3	2.3
Not applicable	8	17.0	36	32.7	44	34.1

APPENDIX E:

Reasons for Placement into Alternative Education for High School Students Who Dropped Out

	Grade 9		Grade 10		Grade 11		Grade 12	
Reason for placement	Number	Percent	Number	Percent	Number	Percent	Number	Percent
Academically unsuccessful	84	22.5	34	25.0	24	27.6	15	29.4
Academically unsuccessful & Potential dropout	28	7.5	4	2.9	4	4.6	2	3.9
Academically unsuccessful & Retained in grade	12	3.2	5	3.7	7	8	7	13.7
Academically unsuccessful & Attendance/tardiness	13	3.5	8	5.9	1	1.1	3	5.9
Attendance/tardiness								
Disciplinary referrals	1	0.3						
Expulsions	28	7.5	2	1.5				
Parent					2	2.3		
Potential dropout	3	0.8	1	0.7	1	1.1		
Retained in grade	4	1.1	3	2.2	5	5.7	1	
Retained in grade, Academically unsuccessful, & Attendance/tardiness	35	9.4	25	18.4	29	33.3	12	23.5
Retained in grade, Academically unsuccessful, & Potential dropout	1	0.3	2	1.5	1	1.1		

	Grade 9		Grade 10		Grade 11		Grade 12	
Reason for placement	Number	Percent	Number	Percent	Number	Percent	Number	Percent
Retained in grade, Academically unsuccessful, Attendance / tardiness, & Potential dropout	2	0.5						
Student substance abuse	1	0.3						
Suspensions								
Suspensions & Disciplinary referrals	1	0.3						
Teenage parent	6	1.6	3	2.2	2	2.3	1	2
Not applicable	154	41.3	48	35.3	11	12.6	10	19.6

APPENDIX F:

Reasons for Placement into Alternative Education for High School Students Who Graduated

	Grade 11		Grade 12	
Reason for placement	Number	Percent	Number	Percent
Academically unsuccessful	3	30.0	47	40.5
Academically unsuccessful & Potential dropout				
Academically unsuccessful & Retained in grade	1	10.0	22	19
Academically unsuccessful & Attendance/tardiness			5	4.
Attendance/tardiness			3	2.6
Disciplinary referrals				
Expulsions				
Parent				
Potential dropout			2	1.7
Retained in grade			2	1.7
Retained in grade, Academically unsuccessful, & Attendance/tardiness	5	50.0	33	28.4
Retained in grade,Academically unsuccessful, & Potential dropout				
Retained in grade, Academically unsuccessful, Attendance / tardiness, & Potential dropout	1	10.0		
Student substance abuse				
Suspensions				
Suspensions & Disciplinary referrals				
Teenage parent				
Not applicable			2	1.7

APPENDIX G:

HISPANIC ENROLLMENT, FACULTY AND ADMINISTRATORS AT MIDDLE SCHOOLS

School No.	School Name	Student Population	# Hispanic	% Hispanic	Teaching Staff	Hispanic Staff	% Hispanic
0041	Adams	1357	235	17.32	74	9	12.16
0201	Benito	1414	196	13.86	91	10	10.99
0561	Buchanan	1428	233	16.32	79	5	6.33
0631	Burnett	1429	104	7.28	80	2	2.50
0651	Burns	1736	150	8.64	91	6	6.59
0921	Coleman	770	126	16.36	53	3	5.66
0842	Dowdell	795	179	22.52	76	3	3.95
1324	Eisenhower	1734	704	40.60	105	4	3.81
1521	Franklin	745	108	14.50	70	6	8.57
1781	Greco	1298	162	12.48	81	4	4.94
1871	Hill	1526	319	20.90	99	6	6.06
2651	Madison	684	104	15.20	41	3	7.32
2801	Mann	1189	201	16.90	82	4	4.88
2841	Marshall	923	129	13.98	61	2	3.28
0322	McLane	1145	189	16.51	82	5	6.10
3002	Middleton	720	135	18.75	55	5	9.09
2362	Monroe	695	91	13.09	45	4	8.89
3161	Oak Grove	1051	403	38.34	78	9	11.54
	Orange Grove	615	106	17.24	46	4	8.70
0082	Pierce	1114	586	52.60	69	12	17.39
3561	Progress Village	598	81	13.55	43	1	2.33
	Rodgers	1525	122	8.00	80	3	3.75
3781	Roland Park	1012	297	29.35	57	10	17.54
1482	Sligh	1079	153	14.18	77	6	7.79
0284	Stewart	811	304	37.48	60	8	13.33
3442	Tomlin	1442	310	21.50	86	3	3.49
4522	Turkey Creek	1651	351	21.26	96	8	8.33
0682	Van Buren	785	182	23.18	60	2	3.33
4592	Walker	1703	249	14.62	95	16	16.84
4601	Washington	533	117	21.95	54	9	16.67
4442	Webb	985	349	35.43	53	4	7.55
4741	Williams	953	145	15.22	70	7	10.00
4761	Wilson	625	91	14.56	43	5	11.63
5041	Young	668	115	17.22	58	1	1.72

APPENDIX H:

Hispanic Enrollment, Faculty and Administrators at High Schools

School No.	School Name	Student Population	# Hispanic	% Hispanic	Teaching Staff	Hispanic Staff	% Hispanic
0131	Armwood	1929	123	6.38	109	3	2.75
0281	Blake	1707	222	13.01	113	9	7.96
4141	Bloomingdale	2679	262	9.78	138	3	2.17
0291	Brandon	2038	262	12.86	139	2	1.44
0761	Chamberlain	2392	463	19.36	137	11	8.03
1291	Durant	2438	333	13.66	136	3	2.21
1322	East Bay	2149	545	25.36	131	11	8.40
1551	Gaither	2748	431	15.68	149	20	13.42
1881	Hillsborough	2261	474	20.96	145	15	10.34
3784	Jefferson	1603	690	43.04	103	15	14.56
2241	King	2200	256	11.64	150	11	7.33
2421	Leto	2352	989	42.05	127	12	9.45
3431	Plant City	2647	353	13.34	153	4	2.61
3411	Plant	1825	286	15.67	105	6	5.71
	Riverview	1749	241	13.78	90	3	3.33
3731	Robinson	1548	204	13.18	94	7	7.45
4151	Sickles	2929	499	17.04	163	16	9.82
4221	Tampa Bay Tech	1700	350	20.59	134	8	5.97
4731	Wharton	2334	397	17.01	130	14	10.77

APPENDIX I:

FOCUS GROUP AND INTERVIEW GUIDES

PARENTS OF HIGH ACHIEVERS
FOCUS GROUP QUESTIONS

QUESTION 1: WHAT IS SCHOOL LIKE FOR YOUR CHILD?

Prompts:
- *What does your child like about school?
- *What does your child not like about school?

QUESTION 2: WHAT ARE SOME OF THE PROBLEMS THAT YOUR CHILD IS HAVING IN SCHOOL?

Prompts:
- *Describe any problems related to being Latino or speaking Spanish.
- *What kind of activities outside of school affect his or her schoolwork?
- *Does your child ever think about dropping out? (Why or why not?)

QUESTION 3: WHAT ARE SOME OF THE THINGS THAT ALLOW YOUR CHILD TO DO WELL IN SCHOOL?

Prompts:
- *What does your child do to get good grades?
- *Who helps your child?
- *How do they help your child?
- *What is the best way for your child to keep out of trouble?

QUESTION 4: DESCRIBE PROGRAMS OR ACTIVITIES THAT HELP YOUR CHILD IN SCHOOL.

Prompts:
- *Which of these programs are especially for Latino students?
- *How are the programs helpful to Latino students?
- *Which programs or activities are you involved in?
- *Which programs or activities are you not involved in?
- *What are the reasons for not being involved in the programs?

QUESTION 5: WHAT ARE SOME OF THE PROGRAMS THAT ARE NEEDED IN YOUR COMMUNITY TO HELP PREVENT LATINO STUDENTS FROM DROPPING OUT OF SCHOOL.

Prompts:
- *What services are available in the community?
- *How should these services change in order to meet the needs of Latinos?
- *What new services could be offered to help Latinos?

HIGH ACHIEVERS
FOCUS GROUP QUESTIONS

QUESTION 1: WHAT IS SCHOOL LIKE FOR YOU?

Prompts:
- *What do you like about school?
- *What do you not like about school?

QUESTION 2: WHAT ARE SOME OF THE PROBLEMS YOU ARE HAVING IN SCHOOL?

Prompts:
- *Describe any problems related to being Latino or speaking Spanish.
- *What kinds of activities outside of school affect your schoolwork?
- *Do you ever think about dropping out? (Why or why not)?

QUESTION 3: WHAT ARE SOME OF THE THINGS THAT MAKE YOU DO WELL IN SCHOOL?

Prompts:
- *What do you do to get good grades?
- *Who else helps you to get good grades?
- *How do they help you?
- *What is the best way to keep out of trouble?

QUESTION 4: DESCRIBE PROGRAMS OR ACTIVITIES THAT HELP YOU IN SCHOOL.

Prompts:
- *Which of these programs are especially for Latino students?
- *How are the programs helpful to Latino students?
- *Which programs or activities are you involved in?
- *Which programs or activities are you not involved in?
- *What are the reasons for not being involved in them?

QUESTION 5: WHAT ARE SOME OF THE PROGRAMS THAT ARE NEEDED IN YOUR COMMUNITY TO HELP TO PREVENT LATINO STUDENTS FROM DROPPING OUT OF SCHOOL?

Prompts:
- *Which services are available for Latinos?
- *How should these services change in order to meet the needs of Latinos?
- *What new services could be offered to help Latinos?

PARENTS OF AT RISK STUDENTS
FOCUS GROUP QUESTIONS

QUESTION 1: WHAT IS SCHOOL LIKE FOR YOUR CHILD?

Prompts:
*What does your child like about school?
*What does your child not like about school?

QUESTION 2: WHAT ARE SOME OF THE PROBLEMS YOUR CHILD IS HAVING IN SCHOOL?

Prompts:
*Describe any problems related to being Latino or speaking Spanish.
*What kinds of activities outside of school affect your child's school-work?
*Does your child ever think about dropping out? (Why or why not?)

QUESTION 3: WHAT HELPS YOUR CHILD IN SCHOOL?

Prompts:
*What has your child done at school that he or she thought was good work or that got a good grade?
*Who helps your child?
*How do they help?
*What would help your child stay out of trouble?

QUESTION 4: DESCRIBE PROGRAMS OR ACTIVITIES THAT HELP YOUR CHILD AT SCHOOL.

Prompts:
*Which of these programs are especially for Latino students?
*How are the programs helpful to Latino students?
*Which programs or activities are you involved in?
*Which programs or activities are you not involved in?
*What are the reasons for not being involved in these programs?

QUESTION 5: WHAT ARE SOME OF THE PROGRAMS THAT ARE NEEDED IN YOUR COMMUNITY TO HELP PREVENT LATINO STUDENTS FROM DROPPING OUT OF SCHOOL?

Prompts:
*Which services are available?
*How should services change in order to meet the needs of Latinos?
*What new services could be offered to help Latinos?

AT RISK STUDENTS
FOCUS GROUP QUESTIONS

QUESTION 1: WHAT IS SCHOOL LIKE FOR YOU?

Prompts:
- *What do you like about school?
- *What do you not like about school?

QUESTION 2: WHAT ARE SOME OF THE PROBLEMS YOU ARE HAVING IN SCHOOL?

Prompts:
- *Describe any problems related to being Latino or speaking Spanish?
- *What kinds of activities outside of school affect your schoolwork?
- *Do you ever think about dropping out? (Why or why not?)

QUESTION 3: WHEN DO YOU DO WELL IN SCHOOL?

Prompts:
- *What have you done that made a good grade or that you thought was good work?
- Who helps you to do well?
- *How do they help you?
- *How have you been able to avoid getting into trouble?

QUESTION 4: DESCRIBE PROGRAMS OR ACTIVITIES THAT HELP YOU AT YOUR SCHOOL.

Prompts:
- *Which of these programs are especially for Latino students?
- *How are the programs helpful to Latino students?
- *Which programs or activities are you involved in?
- *Which programs or activities are you not involved in?
- *What are the reasons some people are not involved in these programs?

QUESTION 5: WHAT ARE SOME OF THE PROGRAMS THAT ARE NEEDED IN YOUR COMMUNITY TO HELP PREVENT LATINO STUDENTS FROM DROPPING OUT OF SCHOOL?

Prompts:
- *What services are available?
- *How should services change in order to meet the needs of Latinos?
- *What new services could be offered to help Latinos?

PARENTS OF DROP OUTS
FOCUS GROUP QUESTIONS

QUESTION 1: WHAT WAS SCHOOL LIKE FOR YOUR CHILD?

Prompts: *What did your child like about school?
*What did you child not like about school?

QUESTION 2: WHAT ARE THE REASONS SOME LATINO STUDENTS ARE ABLE TO DO WELL IN SCHOOL?

Prompts: *How are these students different from your child?
*What would have kept your child in school?

QUESTION 3: WHAT REASONS DID YOUR CHILD HAVE FOR DROPPING OUT OF SCHOOL?

Prompts: *What things in school led them to drop out?
*What things outside of school led them to drop out?
*Do you think that these reasons apply to other dropouts who are not Latino?

QUESTION 4: WHAT HAS HAPPENED TO YOUR CHILD SINCE HE OR SHE DROPPED OUT?

Prompts: *Where is your child living and with whom?
*How is your child making a living?
*What activities are you involved in?

QUESTION 5: DESCRIBE ANY PROGRAMS OR ACTIVITIES THAT HELPED LATINO STUDENTS AT YOUR CHILD'S LAST SCHOOL.

Prompts: *Which of these programs or activities were you involved in? Why or why not?
Were there any programs that were especially for Latino students?

QUESTION 6: WHAT COULD BE DONE TO PREVENT LATINO STUDENTS FROM DROPPING OUT?

Prompts: *What services are available?
*How should services change in order to meet the needs of Latinos?
*What new services could be offered to help Latinos?

DROP OUTS
FOCUS GROUP QUESTIONS

QUESTION 1: WHAT WAS SCHOOL LIKE FOR YOU?

Prompts:
- *What did you like about school?
- *What did you not like about school?

QUESTION 2: WHAT ARE THE REASONS SOME LATINO STUDENTS ARE ABLE TO DO WELL IN SCHOOL?

Prompts:
- *How are these students different from you?
- *What would have kept you in school?

QUESTION 3: WHAT REASONS DID YOU HAVE FOR DROPPING OUT OF SCHOOL?

Prompts:
- *What things in school led you to drop out?
- *What things outside of school led you to drop out?
- *Do you think that these reasons apply to other dropouts who are not Latino?

QUESTION 4: WHAT HAS HAPPENED TO YOU SINCE YOU DROPPED OUT?

Prompts:
- *Where are you living and with whom?
- *How are you making a living?
- *What activities are you involved in?

QUESTION 5: DESCRIBE PROGRAMS OR ACTIVITIES THAT HELPED LATINO STUDENTS AT YOUR LAST SCHOOL.

Prompts:
- *Which of these programs or activities were you involved in? Why or why not?
- *Were there any programs that were especially for Latino students?

QUESTION6: WHAT COULD BE DONE TO PREVENT LATINO STUDENTS FROM DROPPING OUT?

Prompts:
- *What services are available?
- *How should services change in order to meet the needs of Latinos?
- *What new services could be offered to help Latinos?

TEACHERS
FOCUS GROUP QUESTIONS

QUESTION 1: WHAT LEADS TO LATINO STUDENT DROP OUT?

Prompts:
- *What are characteristics of Latino students who drop out?
- *What are some of the issues for Latino students at school?
- *How serious is Latino drop out in your school?

QUESTION 2: DESCRIBE THE SUCCESSFUL LATINO STUDENTS AT YOUR SCHOOL.

Prompts:
- *What are their characteristics?
- *Why are they successful?

QUESTION 3: WHAT ARE THE SOCIETAL IMPLICATIONS FOR LATINO STUDENTS DROPPING OUT?

Prompts:
- *What happens to these students after they leave school?
- *How is the community affected by Latino students who drop out?

QUESTION 4: WHAT DOES YOUR SCHOOL DO TO ADDRESS THE SPECIFIC NEEDS OF AT-RISK LATINO STUDENTS?

Prompts:
- *What do <u>you</u> do to help Latino students to succeed?
- *What barriers exist for you to help Latino students?

QUESTION 5: WHAT SOCIAL SERVICES OR COMMUNITY PROGRAMS ARE NEEDED TO MEET THE NEEDS OF AT-RISK LATINO STUDENTS?

Prompts:
- *What kind of resources are needed?
- *What kind of information is needed?
- *Who needs to be involved?

SEMI-STRUCTURED INTERVIEW GUIDE

Respondent: _____ Date: _____
Position: _____ Begin time: _____ End time: _____
Organization: _____ Researcher: _____
Phone: _____

Before interview begins:

1. Introduce yourself and the study:

The Latino Dropout Study is being carried out by the Latino Coalition and funded by the Children's Board of Hillsborough County. This is not an evaluation and is not school system study, but we will share the final report with the School Board and participating schools. Your name will not be used in the report, but your input will be identified with your position.

2. Summarize the goals of the study:

- To identify factors leading to success in school and factors leading to dropping out.
- To identify characteristics of specific Latino populations that are at risk of dropping out.
- To identify social implications of dropping out.
- To examine existing dropout prevention programs.
- To identify unmet needs of Latino students that new programs should address.

3. Explain the interview process:

The questions I will ask are in a semi-structured format, that is, we are asking every interviewee the same questions, but are leaving the answers open-ended so that you can answer in the way that you think is appropriate. Your participation is completely voluntary and your answers will be kept confidential.
Would you be willing to let me tape record this interview?

Do you have any questions before we begin?

Interview Guide:

1) In what ways do you come in contact with Latino students or dropouts? (Describe your relationship/responsibilities)

2) From your perspective, why are Latino students dropping out of school and how do you know this?

3) Describe Latinos who have done well as students in the educational system.

4) What happens to Latino students who drop out and how does this affect the community? How does it affect you or your organization?

5) Describe any programs you are aware of that help Latino students succeed in school and prevent drop out.

6) What kinds of programs or services are missing in this community to help Latino students succeed? What kinds of resources, information and people need to be involved?

Interview Guide for Principals

Respondent: _____ Date: _____
Position: _____ Begin time: _____ End time: _____
School: _____ Researcher: _____
Phone: _____

Before interview begins:

1. Introduce yourself and the study:
   The Latino Dropout Study is being carried out by the Latino Coalition and funded by the Children's Board of Hillsborough County. This is not an evaluation and is not a school system study, but we will share the final report with the School Board and participating schools. Your name will not be used in the report, but your input will be identified with your position.

2. Summarize the goals of the study:
   - To identify factors leading to success in school and factors leading to dropping out.
   - To identify characteristics of specific Latino populations that are at risk of dropping out.
   - To identify social implications of dropping out.
   - To identify existing dropout prevention programs or strategies.
   - To identify unmet needs of Latino students that new programs could address.

3. Explain the interview process:
   The questions are in a semi-structured format, leaving the answers open-ended so that you can answer in the way that you think is appropriate.
   Your participation is completely voluntary and your answers will be kept confidential.

   Would you be willing to let me tape record this interview?

   Do you have any questions before we begin?

Interview Guide:

1) Describe the Latino population at your school. (Include discussion of students and teachers, males and females, country of origin, SES level, acculturation level).

2) What school district policies/procedures/programs most affect the Latino students at your school and their families- both positively and negatively? (How much flexibility do you have in the implementation of these policies/procedures/programs?)

3) From your perspective, why are Latino students dropping out of school?

4) What are the characteristics of Latino students who drop out or are at risk of dropping out? (Include male/female, nationality, SES distinctions)

5) How are at-risk Latino students identified for services at your school?
What is the procedure for placement of at-risk Latino students in special programs at your school?

6) As far as you know, what happens to Latino students who have dropped out of school and how does this impact the community?

7) Describe Latino students who have done well in school.
(Include characteristics and activities involved in.)

8) Describe any programs or activities that help Latino students succeed in school or help prevent drop out.

9) How do Latino students get into special programs or activities in your school (who identifies them, who chooses membership, does GPA matter)? Include both preventive such as ILAP, and enrichment activities such as AP classes, clubs, competitions.

10) In what ways have special programs helped Latino students?

11) Describe any other programs or services at your school that specifically benefit Latino students and their parents.

Examples:

bilingual staff (and position in school)
Spanish translations of letters/newsletters and policy manuals
after school programs
volunteer teacher activities
clubs
cultural assemblies or celebrations
textbooks
library materials

guest speakers
signs in Spanish
bilingual phone messages
flexible hours for parent meetings
transportation for after school programs
bilingual/bicultural guidance for college prep and admission procedures
higher level Spanish courses, such as literature

12) What kinds of programs or services are missing in this community or school to help Latino students succeed? (Or what barriers are there for existing efforts?)

13) What kinds of resources, information and people need to be involved to help Latino students succeed?

14) Is there anything else I haven't thought to ask you about that you think needs to be included in this study?

Note: Go back over questions to make sure you haven't left anything out!

APPENDIX I:
SCREENING SURVEY

Screener_____ Date_____

School_____

Informant_____

Phone number_____

INTRODUCTION: Hi, my name is _____ and (principal's or teacher's name) suggested I call you. We are from the University of South Florida and are doing a study on why Latino students drop out of school in Hillsborough county. (Principal's or teacher's name) said that you might be a good person to talk with, and I wanted to see if you would be interested in talking to me.

SCREENING QUESTIONNAIRE:

LATINO QUALIFICATIONS - ASK OF EVERYONE

(3 out of 4 "yes" answers to continue)

1.	Born outside of United States.	Yes	No
2.	Speak Spanish.	Yes	No
3.	Latin surname.	Yes	No
4.	One or both parents Latin origin.	Yes	No

DEMOGRAPHICS - ASK OF EVERYONE

1. Name_____
2. Male Female
3. How old are you?_____
4. Where were you born (which country)?_____
5. Where was your mother born?_____
6. Where was your father born?_____
7. How many years have you lived in the United States?_____

8. What grade are you in, or how many years of school have you had?_____

9. How many people live in your household?_____Number of adults_____
Number of children (18 and younger)_____

10. Which programs, special classes, clubs or organizations are you (or your child)involved in at school?_____

11. How long have you lived in Hillsborough County?_____
Where did you live before?_____
Where do you live now?_____

12. What language are you most comfortable speaking?_____

13 What is your occupation? (*for adolescents, ask what is their parent's occupation*)?_____

HIGH ACHIEVING SCREENING

(4 out of 6 in left hand column - first 3 questions most important)

1.	Are most of your grades in classes A's and B's?	Yes	No
2.	Do you enjoy school?	Yes	No
3.	Are you planning on staying in school and graduating?	Yes	No
4.	Are you involved in clubs, sports, or music in school outside of classes?	Yes	No
5.	Are you thinking about, or have you ever thought about, dropping out of school?	No	Yes
6.	Do you receive free or reduced lunch?	No	Yes

AT RISK SCREENING

(4 out of 6 in left hand column - first 3 questions most important)

1.	Are most of your grades in classes C's, D's, and F's?	Yes	No
2.	Are you thinking about, or have you ever thought about, dropping out of school?	Yes	No
3.	Are you planning on staying in school and graduating?	No	Yes
4	Do you enjoy school?	No	Yes

5. Are you involved in special programs? Yes No
Which ones?_____
(Interviewer, please ask carefully about SLD, EH, ILAP if not mentioned)

6. Do you receive free or reduced lunch? Yes No

PARENTS OF AT RISK AND HIGH ACHIEVERS SCREENING

(ask if child fits into previous categories)

YOUTH WHO HAVE DROPPED OUT OF SCHOOL

(Must answer Yes to questions 1 & 2 to qualify for study)

1. Are you age 16-23? Yes No

2. Did you drop out of a Hillsborough County School? Yes No
Which school?_____

3. When did you drop out? age:_____grade:_____semester:_____

4. Have you ever gone back to school? Yes No
If yes, did you go back to day school or night school?_____
When did you go back?_____

PARENTS OF YOUTH WHO HAVE DROPPED OUT

(must answer yes to following question to qualify for study)

1. Do you have a child that has dropped out of a Hillsborough County School?
Yes No

Thank you very much for answering these questions. In the next few weeks, we are getting together a group of people like you to have a discussion about Latino students and why so many are dropping out of school. We would pay you for your time and the discussion would last about 1:30 hours. Would you be interested in being a part of this discussion group?

*When is a good time for you?*_____
*Do you have transportation to (name of location)?*_____
*Will you need childcare?*_____

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